



# Mental Health Care Information for Migrants, Refugees and Visitors to Australia

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Mental health is a state of coping, feeling good and being in control of your life. Mental illness can stop people from living life to their full potential and it is useful to seek help from specialised health professionals.

Migrants, refugees and visitors to Australia can find themselves alone or feeling alone in an unfamiliar place. Migrants and refugees face many difficulties in adjusting to their new environment that can have an impact on their mental health. Certain challenges can include language barrier, loss of family and social support, lack of recognition of their professional qualifications and trauma experienced before or after migration. Sometimes stresses can become too much to deal with, causing a person to 'break down' emotionally or mentally. They may need to ask for help or support while they adjust.

This fact sheet explains where to go for support, treatment for mental health concerns and what health entitlements are available for migrants, refugees and visitors to Australia. It also lists some of the organisations that may be helpful in the search for mental health care and information.

## **Signs of Mental Illness**

Signs of mental illness include feeling very sad, distress, anxious or experiencing strange thoughts, experiencing delusions or hallucinations or any of a wide range of things that lead you to wonder if you are 'going mad'. You may be finding life difficult to cope with or feel overwhelmed by day-to-day living. It can often take a while to realise that you need help but once you do, you need to know where help is available.

## **'Consumers'**

'Consumers' is a widely used term in Australia as it refers to people who are seeking help because they are experiencing mental health problems. This term is preferred because it implies that people have choices and rights concerning treatment and their place in the broader community.

## **Where to go first**

The first place to go for anyone concerned about their mental health is to see a doctor, often referred to as a General Practitioner, GP or 'family doctor'. In Australia some doctors have received special training in mental health care. Some of these doctors are listed on the beyondblue web site at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or you can contact the Mental Health Information Service on 1300 794 991. Payments required by GPs vary

and people who are entitled to Medicare can usually pay a small amount and in some cases nothing (this is called 'bulk billing').

### **Medicare and the 'Welcome Kit'**

Medicare is Australia's public health insurance scheme.

To get a Medicare card:

- 1 Ring **132 011** and ask for your nearest Medicare office.
- 2 Go to the Medicare office and ask for the ***Welcome Kit***.

The *Welcome Kit* is in Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Croatian, English, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Macedonian, Serbian, Spanish and Vietnamese. You will need to show your passport, a second form of identification, and possibly your travel documents.

People who reside in Australia – excluding Norfolk Island – are eligible for Medicare if they have one of the following:

- Australian citizenship
- A permanent resident visa
- New Zealand citizenship
- An application for certain permanent resident visas and hold a valid visa with permission to work in Australia
- A valid visa and are the parent, spouse or child who is an Australian citizen or permanent resident status.
- Are covered by a Reciprocal Health care agreement with another country.

### **Reciprocal Health Care Agreement**

The Australian government has signed a health care agreement with other countries aiming to cover Australians for the cost of medical treatment while they are overseas. The agreement also provides support services as well as subsidized costs of medicines that may be required. Countries that hold this health care agreement with Australia include:

New Zealand  
United Kingdom  
The Republic of Ireland  
Sweden  
Norway  
Belgium  
Finland  
The Netherlands  
Italy  
Malta  
Slovenia

### **Students**

If you are visiting Australia on a student visa you are not covered by Medicare. You should take out your own health insurance cover, otherwise you will be required to pay the full cost of any treatment that you need.

## **Working Holidaymakers/Backpackers**

If you are on a working holiday visa, you may be covered by a 'reciprocal agreement' where you can obtain basic medical care, such as seeing a General Practitioner.

As a resident of the Republic of Ireland or New Zealand you are entitled to free treatment as a public inpatient or outpatient at a public hospital and access to subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) during your visit to Australia. This covers any ill health or injury needing immediate treatment while in Australia. To access these benefits you should show your passport at hospitals or pharmacies. You are not entitled to Medicare benefits for medical treatment provided by doctors through private surgeries and community health centres.

If you are a resident of the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Norway or the Netherlands you are covered by Medicare for the duration of your approved visit to Australia.

As a resident of Malta or Italy, you are covered for a period of six months from the date you arrive in Australia. You are entitled to free treatment as a public inpatient or outpatient at a public hospital, and access to subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) during your visit to Australia. You are also entitled to Medicare benefits for out-of-hospital medical treatment provided by doctors through private surgeries and community health centres.

You can enrol at Medicare offices throughout Australia as soon as you arrive – take all your I.D. with you. If you receive treatment before you enrol, Medicare benefits will be back paid for eligible visitors.

## **Health Care Cards**

Low income earners and people on some benefits and pensions from the government may be entitled to a Health Care Card. A Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card helps to pay for medicines prescribed by doctors, and some doctors will bulk bill for patients with this card.

For more information, ring the Centrelink Multilingual Call Centre on 131 202. If you speak English, you can ring Centrelink on 136 150.

You might **not** be eligible for Medicare if you:

- Have a current parent visa application being considered or have a current application for a protection visa and have previously applied for a parent visa
- Have a temporary prospective marriage visa (fiancé- subclass 300) – you are not eligible for Medicare until you have had an application for a permanent resident visa accepted by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA).

## **Where else can you go for help?**

A **psychiatrist** is a medical doctor who has trained further and specialises in treating mental illness. Psychiatrists tend to focus on providing assessment and medication, although they can do other types of therapy as well. Psychiatrists' fees are partially

covered by Medicare but there will be a 'gap' that you need to pay. If this is difficult, try the community mental health service in your area. Your GP can refer you to a psychiatrist.

A **psychologist** cannot prescribe medication but they offer assessment and treatment for mental health problems. They offer 'talking' therapies such as counselling, behaviour therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy and many others. Medicare covers some of the cost of psychologists' fees when you are referred by your GP.

### **Community Mental Health Services**

In addition to your GP, some community health centres may offer help with mental health and welfare problems. Some centres provide social workers or psychologists who give counselling and social support and all have links to local psychiatrists. Community health centres often have multicultural health workers to help people from local ethnic groups, whilst Neighbourhood Centres often provide social support and programs for people living locally. There may be a small fee for some services. For your nearest centre look in the White Pages telephone book under 'Community Health Centres' or call the Mental Health Information Service for details on 1300 794 991. You do not usually need a referral.

### **Counselling**

Counsellors are trained to help people talk about their problems and feelings, and find ways of coping with them. This can be useful if you have a mental health problem or when you have other problems in your life such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, employment worries, etc.

### **Support Group**

A support group is where a group of people take part in a structured and safe program aiming to provide emotional support to help assist with specific mental health issues.

The **Transcultural Mental Health Centre** is a state-wide organisation funded by the NSW Health Department. They provide a clinical service which includes: multilingual psychosocial assessment, counselling, individual family and group psycho-education, and language specific outreach clinics to complement existing mental health services and to assist consumers and carers to access these services more effectively. They can be contacted on (02) 9912 3850.

### **The Asylum Seeker Assistance (ASA) Scheme**

Red Cross caseworkers can help asylum seekers gain financial assistance that can help cover day to day living expenses, general health care including mental health care costs and protection visas.

They can also help with gaining access to Medicare (where eligible) and offer referral to counselling, accommodation and education services. The scheme is administered by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) through contractual arrangements with the Australian Red Cross Society.

There is eligibility restrictions for the Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme that states in order to receive financial support, a person must be waiting for a decision on a protection visa for six months or more; however there are some exemption. For more information on eligibility for the Asylum Seeker Assistance (ASA) Scheme call the Australian Red Cross NSW on 1800 812 028

**The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)** offers a range of services for refugees who have been exposed to torture and trauma. These services include assessment, counselling, psychiatric assessment and interventions, family therapy, group therapy, support groups, youth programs and child counselling. They can be contacted on (02) 9794 1900 or Auburn office (02) 9646 6666.

### **Interpreting Service**

Health Care Interpreters may be available over the phone during business hours. If they are not available call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450. TIS can connect you to an interpreter who speaks your language at any time, day or night.

To contact the Health Care Interpreter Service, ring:

Central and South Eastern Sydney  
(02) 9912 3800

Northern Sydney  
(02) 9912 3800

South Western Sydney  
(02) 9828 6088

Western Sydney and Wentworth  
(02) 9840 3456

Hunter  
(02) 4924 6285

All country areas of NSW except Greater Murray and Southern  
1800 674 994; After Hours 1800 674 994

Illawarra  
(02) 4274 4211

Greater Murray and Southern  
1800 247 272; After Hours (02) 1800 247 272

### **Hospital Admission**

A person can be admitted to hospital under the NSW Mental Health Act as a voluntary or involuntary patient. This happens when a person is considered to be mentally ill or mentally disordered and at risk of serious harm to themselves or others. This includes physical harm, harm to reputation, relationships, finances and self-neglect and no other care of a less restrictive kind is available. If you are concerned about yourself or someone else, contact your local area mental health service.

### **Voluntary Admission**

This occurs when a person feels mentally unwell and admits themselves to hospital for a period of treatment.

## **Involuntary Admission**

This occurs when a person is taken to hospital or treatment facility against their wishes. Once they get to hospital they are assessed by at least two doctors and a decision is made whether hospital treatment is appropriate. A person is given a Statement of Rights under these circumstances and can seek independent advice if they believe they are being unjustly detained.

### **For information and advice the following numbers may be helpful:**

- Mental Health Information Service 1300 794 991
- Your local Community Health Centre (under Community in the White Pages Telephone Directory)
- Alcohol & Drug Information Service (02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599

### **References:**

[http://www.immi.gov.au/grants/mrc\\_msa\\_b.htm#nsw](http://www.immi.gov.au/grants/mrc_msa_b.htm#nsw)

<http://www.startts.org/>

<http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/62assistance.htm>

<http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/images/pdfs/booklet.pdf>

Mental Health Act Guide Book, NSW Institute of Psychiatry, 2003

[http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/m/pdf/mh\\_guidebook.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/m/pdf/mh_guidebook.pdf)

NSW Mental Health Act, 2007

NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal

<http://www.mhrt.nsw.gov.au>

Health Matters Consumer Guides

Migrant Health Services

<http://www.abc.net.au/health/cguides/migranthealth.htm#e>

NSW Health Care System Information Booklet

<http://www.swsahs.nsw.gov.au/areaser/refugeehs/docs/HIP%20Booklet%20English%20v5%20Jan05.doc>

Transcultural Mental Health Centre

<http://www.dhi.gov.au/tmhc/index.htm>



**Telephone Interpreter  
Service 131 450**

If English is not your first language please call the Mental Health Information Service through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). This service is free to non-English

speaking Australian citizens or permanent residents. TIS have access to interpreters speaking more than 120 languages and dialects.

## **Mental Health Resource Centre**

The Resource Centre contains material that promotes a better understanding of mental health issues. New books and DVDs are purchased on a regular basis and visitors are welcome to come in and browse.

Members of MHA, CAG and ARAFMI may check-out resources on loan. The length of the loan is 3 weeks. Membership costs between \$10 - \$30 per individual per annum. Please note that most of the reference books are not available for loan.

You will find the Resource Centre Booklist on our website: [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au) for further information contact 1300 794 991.

### **Disclaimer**

*This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed. The listed websites provide additional information, but should not be taken as an endorsement or recommendation.*

*This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW. This and other fact sheets are available for download from [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au). The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.*

*This fact sheet was last updated in November 2012*



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