

Research investment failing mental health

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More money and effort needs to be directed to understanding the causes and treatment of mental disorders to ensure improvements in the health of the community and the one in five people that experience mental illness in any one year.

Experts from AFFIRM – The Australia Foundation for Mental Health Research and the ANU Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) said that Mental Health Week, which begins on Sunday, is an opportunity for the community to support research on an illness which impacts many Australians.

Professor Helen Christensen, CMHR Director and Board Member with AFFIRM, said that increased investment in mental health research will improve prevention of mental disorders, help with predicting risk and assist in the development of better treatments.

"Relatively speaking, mental health research has received little of the research dollar relative to the burden of disease it contributes," she said. "One in five Australians experience mental illness in their lifetime, but the best figures to date suggest only three per cent of total research and development funding in health is directed to mental health disorders.

"Research into mental health disorders in young people is particularly important because depression and anxiety begin in childhood and become more prevalent in adolescence. Young Australians rate depression and suicide as the leading issue confronting them, yet we have little practical knowledge as to the means to prevent suicide in this

age group."

Associate Professor Kathy Griffiths of AFFIRM and CMHR said that the stigma attached to mental health disorders means that the issue is often brushed under the carpet.

"Some 21 per cent of Australian adults say they would be unwilling to work with an individual with depression, 30 per cent would not vote for a politician with depression and 25 per cent believe one can just 'snap out' of depression. These public misconceptions may contribute to the decision by two thirds of people with a mental illness not to seek professional help.

"This not only has serious implications for an individual's quality of life and community well being, one wonders if it also means that research, and research funding, is stigmatised too," she said.

Chair of AFFIRM, former Senator Margaret Reid said that Mental Health Week was a time to consider the important role of research in contributing to improving the mental health of our communities. "Mental illness extends beyond individuals and affects family, friends and the wider community. It affects us all," she said. "Research is critical if we are to make longstanding improvements in the health of our community."

Source: Research Australia

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