

Media Release

Millions of dollars urgently need to be ploughed into Australia's dysfunctional mental health system warns the not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA).

CEO Tony Stevenson says a staggering 50% of people with schizophrenia now attempt suicide.

He points out a recent study revealed 95% of participants said they had experienced stigma and discrimination.

Data reveals 45% of all Australians will experience a mental disorder at some point ... and 1 in 5 Australians have experienced a mental disorder in the past 12 months.

This year's MIFA campaign highlights there is way too much stigma around schizophrenia and it is critical the ridiculous myths around the condition are busted.

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) is calling on the Federal Government to plough \$1.75 Billion of much needed funds into mental health.

It is highlighting staggering figures show up to 50% of people with schizophrenia now attempt suicide.

CEO Tony Stevenson says it is absolutely unacceptable that the life expectancy of people with schizophrenia is up to 19 years less than people without the condition. He says the gap is tragically continuing to widen.

One recent study revealed 95% of participants said they had experienced stigma and discrimination in the past 12 months. Tony Stevenson said this huge statistic is deeply troubling.





Data shows 45% of all Australians will experience a mental disorder at some point and 1 in 5 Australians have experienced a mental disorder in the past 12 months. Around 700,000 Australians have a severe mental illness.

This year's mental health awareness campaign highlights that there is way too much stigma around schizophrenia.

Tony Stevenson said, "There are numerous common and fairly ridiculous myths out there. People think that someone with schizophrenia is violent or has a split personality. This is utter nonsense. People have the view people with schizophrenia never recover. Not true at all. Many people with schizophrenia manage their condition successfully and can hold down a job and lead a highly productive life."

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia estimates 1 in 100 people in Australia live with schizophrenia. The organisation highlights help is freely available.

Tony Stevenson said, "People who have experience of schizophrenia tell us clearly they need more acceptance and much less stigma. They want their contributions to society recognised. They want the support of their peers."

Tony Stevenson added, "People are not alone. We want to support people in their recovery journey. We ask people to reach out for the support that is actually out there."

MIFA highlights it has a FREE phone line which will offer people advice on where to go to get more support. All people need to do is call 1800 985 944 or visit www.minetworks.org.au.

Tony Stevenson said, "Studies show at least 1 in 7 people with schizophrenia FULLY recover. Some studies suggest the real figure may be 1 in 2. Strong family relationships, adhering to treatment and a supportive therapeutic relationship all make a world of difference."

The onset of schizophrenia typically starts between the age of 15 to 30. Research shows people who live with psychosis experience higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, asthma, kidney disease, stroke and other conditions.



Tony Stevenson added, "The stigma often comes from members of the person's own family. Sometimes – fearful – people with schizophrenia avoid others. This clearly is not healthy."

"Put simply we desperately need more education, understanding and acceptance. People with schizophrenia want to be treated as others are ... and obviously deserve that. They want to be seen as the person they are ... not their mental health diagnosis."

"People with schizophrenia alarmingly say they have been profoundly impacted by discrimination and stigma."

"In one survey, 88% of participants said they had seen, read or heard social media content portraying people with mental health issues as dangerous, unsafe or unpredictable."

"It is all connected to a clear misunderstanding of schizophrenia – and it is out there in our workplaces, schools and universities. Stigma worsens psychological distress. It stops people from reaching out."

"We believe our current mental health system needs much more funding. It is dysfunctional. It is fragmented. Reform is desperately needed. We also need much more housing support, employment support and more."

"Let's wake up to the facts. Mental illness is very common. It affects people of all ages, educational and income levels. We need radical change. It is needed now."

**Media enquiries to Media Key on 03 9769 6488
Tony Stevenson is available for interview.**