



MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE USE

People who have mental health issues – including schizophrenia – are urged to reach out and get the free help that is out there as shocking research shows less than 50% people who have schizophrenia are even getting clinical assistance.

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) is highlighting a huge 230,000 people have schizophrenia, a million Australians are impacted and research shows psychosis is now costing Australian society \$4.91 billion annually.

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia is out to dispel the many ridiculous myths about schizophrenia and wants to highlight people with schizophrenia can and do recover. MIFA CEO says it is a national disgrace that the average life expectancy of someone with schizophrenia in Australia is just 54 years old and he highlights it is deeply alarming that people with schizophrenia are 12 times more likely to die from suicide than the general population.

MIFA has a free phone line people anywhere can call to get advice as to who to go to locally.

People who have mental health issues or schizophrenia are being urged to reach out and get help as shocking figures show a million Australians are being impacted by schizophrenia.

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) says a massive 230,000 people across the nation have schizophrenia and too many people in local communities are not reaching out to get the help they desperately need.

Research reveals less than 50% of the people who have schizophrenia are actually getting clinical or recovery assistance.

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia's CEO Tony Stevenson says it is alarming to know how many people are not getting help. He says it is a national disgrace that the average life expectancy of somebody in Australia with schizophrenia is just 54 years old. He adds that there is massive stigma in Australia in relation to those who have schizophrenia.

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia highlights the life expectancy of people affected by schizophrenia is going backwards at the current time and people with schizophrenia are 12 times more likely to die from suicide than the general population.

Tony Stevenson said, “Make no mistake, there is significant support out there to help people. There are specialists available to assist people with schizophrenia. There are so many ridiculous myths about schizophrenia. We want to dispel those myths.”

Tony Stevenson said people who have schizophrenia can and do recover, if they have the right recovery support services. Some studies report as many as 1 in 3 people fully recover a healthy life in their community, with less severe and less frequent psychotic episodes. Tony Stevenson said, “It is an absolute myth to believe people with schizophrenia are in some way violent. They are no more likely to be violent than anybody else. Obviously you cannot just will schizophrenia away.”

“You have to have evidence-based treatment by qualified mental health professionals, and recovery support from experienced community organisations. Far and away one of the biggest myths is the idea that people with schizophrenia have a split personality. It’s total nonsense.”

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia says there are a number of early warning signs that may indicate somebody may have schizophrenia (or another mental illness).

These include:

- Changes in mood or rapid mood changes.
- Unusual behaviour.
- Excessive sleep and loss of energy or sleep disturbances.
- A person withdrawing and isolating themselves from friends and family.
- A clear decline in work or school performance.
- Difficulties with memory and concentration and increased suspiciousness.

Tony Stevenson said, “The mere fact that the life expectancy of Australians with schizophrenia is 19 years less than someone else is appalling. We are basically talking about people with schizophrenia having the same life expectancy that people had in the 1930s. Cigarette smoking, hypertension, diabetes and suicide are all contributors to the number of people dying with schizophrenia.”

“Recent research has clearly revealed people living with psychosis in Australia experience higher rates of heart disease, asthma, diabetes, hepatitis, epilepsy, kidney disease and stroke. They also smoke at three times the rate of the general population.”

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia says the annual costs of psychosis are staggering. Research shows psychosis costs Australian society \$4.91 billion annually. Psychosis costs the Australian Government almost \$3.52 billion annually.

Tony Stevenson added, “Schizophrenia typically starts during adolescence or early adulthood. In the past 15 years we have seen increasing evidence proving early treatment is critical.”

Anybody wanting help regarding schizophrenia – or any mental health issue whatsoever – is urged to ring the free number that the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia runs ... which will put them in touch with somebody close to their local community. The number is 1800 985 944 or go to www.minetworks.org.au.

Media enquiries to: Media Key on 03 9769 6488