



**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL
WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 7TH, 2020**

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) bluntly warns people’s mental health conditions have escalated significantly due to fear, anxiety and social isolation.

MIFA’s Tony Stevenson says it is alarming that a staggering 54% of people with a mental illness do not access any kind of treatment and close to 7 in 10 of ALL GP presentations are people with mental health issues.

MIFA highlights 3.8 million Australians now live with a mental illness, nearly half of all Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime and people with severe and complex mental health conditions are a high risk vulnerable group for COVID-19 complications.

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) is urging people in the XXX area, who have mental health issues, to reach out and get the help they need as it reveals people with severe and complex mental health conditions are a high risk vulnerable group for COVID-19 complications.

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia highlights a staggering 54% of people who have a mental illness do not access any kind of treatment. It also highlights a huge 65% of ALL GP presentations are now for mental health issues.

In short, mental health issues are nearly 7 in 10 of all GP presentations. Mental health situations are dramatically increasing. MIFA’s CEO, Tony Stevenson says it is deeply concerning that doctors (in Victoria) are now warning the increasing number of mental health cases is actually surpassing every other hospital presentation.

Tony Stevenson bluntly warns there is no question that people’s mental health conditions have escalated significantly because of fear, anxiety, and social isolation. Tony says it is reported that in Victoria, police are now attending mental health incidents every 10 minutes.

Tony Stevenson said, “We have gone to extraordinary efforts during this pandemic. Think what it might be like if we were able to do this all the time.”

MIFA has revealed:

- Close to half (45%) of ALL Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime.
- It is now estimated a huge 3.8 million Australians now live with a mental illness.
- 690,000 Australians live with a severe mental illness (including 350,000 who have added complexities that cause issues with their recovery).
- Of the 20% of Australians who have a mental illness in any one year, 11.5% have one disorder and 8.5% have two or more disorders.

Tony Stevenson said, “We applaud well-known psychiatrist and former Australian of the Year, Patrick McGorry, for highlighting that if you have acute mania or acute psychosis, you cannot wait 24 hours for treatment. When he says if this was happening with chest pains or cancer, there would be an absolute out-cry he is – in our view – telling it the way it is.”

“MIFA’s latest campaign is using the theme “Mental health for all. Greater investment – greater access. Everyone, everywhere.” Obviously with the highly complex COVID situation, we are all in this together.”

“We do acknowledge the Government’s support so far with additional investments in mental health services in response to the pandemic. This funding has increased access to telehealth services and funded a dedicated mental health support line through Beyond Blue. Despite this, we are not seeing additional services on the ground to support people with severe and complex mental health conditions who need extra support right now.”

“We have to be investing in services that help people with mental health issues. We have to make it easier for people to access the help that is actually out there. We want to see healthier families. There can be no doubt that ensuring access actually helps everyone. We have to build care and caring for each other.”

“All of us are responsible for what actually happens in our world. Obviously we all need to support each other, connect with others and look out for each other. That’s down to us to do as a community.”

“The world is experiencing an unprecedented impact of a global health emergency ... because of COVID-19. It has deeply impacted on the mental health of millions of people. The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia is very aware that levels of anxiety, fear, isolation, physical distancing and restrictions ... as well as emotional distress ... have well and truly become widespread – as the world seeks to find solutions.”

Tony Stevenson says anyone with a mental health issue needs to reach out and ask for help. He highlights there is a great deal of help out there and the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia has a free phone line people can ring from anywhere to get information on where they might find help.

The MIFA hotline is **1800 985 944** or visit www.minetworks.org.au. It is a completely free service that aims to identify where people can go to get help.

Tony Stevenson added, “People with a severe mental illness have many challenges to deal with. They are actually six times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease and four times more likely to die from respiratory disease. They are three to four times more likely to die prematurely, likely to die 20 years earlier than the general population and they account for approximately one third of all avoidable deaths.”” But with the right support – clinical and community support – people can and do recover.

“This pandemic has changed so many things in society. Australia has unquestionably handled the crisis well. Our over-arching message is that if you have a mental health issue or you know somebody who might need a hand; reach out because the help is out there.”

**Media enquiries to: Media Key on 03 9769 6488 or 0409 420 112
Tony Stevenson is available for interviews.**