



Media Release

19 May 2022

AT A GLANCE: The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) says it is deeply shameful that a massive 50% of people with schizophrenia in Australia simply do not get the support they desperately need.

1 in 100 people now lives with schizophrenia. MIFA CEO Tony Stevenson says on a wider scale, at least half the people in Australia who have severe mental health conditions do not have access to support which would assist them.

He points out, often these people end up in emergency departments (50% of people with schizophrenia attempt suicide) and at least 150,000 people with severe mental illness do not have the critical support in the community.

Tony Stevenson highlights these people may end up at a very serious risk of homelessness, poverty and social isolation. He says recent research reveals people who now live with psychosis experience higher rates of heart and kidney disease, stroke, epilepsy, diabetes, arthritis and more.

STORY IN FULL: The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) says it is absolutely shameful that a massive 50% of people with schizophrenia in Australia simply do not receive the support they desperately need.

1 in 100 people in Australia currently lives with schizophrenia.

MIFA CEO Tony Stevenson bluntly warns it is estimated at least half the people in Australia who have severe or complex mental health conditions now do not have the support which would help them with their recovery.

He highlights that sadly often hospital ends up being the only option for many people affected. He points out people frequently wait for their distress to escalate into a major crisis before they seek support at emergency departments.

Tony Stevenson said over 150,000 people with severe and complex mental illness still do not have access to supports in the community to enable them to live well and independently.

He says it is deeply troubling that, at the current time, up to 50% of people with schizophrenia attempt suicide. He highlights the life expectancy for people with schizophrenia is up to 19 years less than other people ... and this huge gap is continuing to widen.

Tony Stevenson said, "People with severe and complex mental illness have clearly been let down again by the recent Federal Budget. It did not allocate any new funds for services that would directly support people with severe and complex mental illness. They are some of our most vulnerable Australians."

"The current situation is both traumatic and debilitating for many people with schizophrenia. Change is urgently needed. We are calling for more community mental health support so people with schizophrenia can access that desperately needed support early on – close to where they live."

Tony Stevenson points out schizophrenia – along with other severe mental health conditions – must be viewed like any other illness. He says way too many people spend literally years of their life in hospitals.

He added, "It is alarming to know that people actually end up at a very serious risk of homelessness, social isolation, poor physical health, poverty and with numerous other issues."

"Recent research has revealed – which is very concerning – people who live with psychosis now experience higher rates of heart and kidney disease, stroke, epilepsy, asthma, diabetes, arthritis and more. They also smoke at three times that of the general population."

"There are many ridiculous myths about schizophrenia ... such as people with schizophrenia are violent; have a split personality; cannot hold onto a job or never recover. These myths are not true."

"Clearly recovery is possible. We have a key network which is called 'Finding North Network'. It is a growing on-line community of people who want to share their experiences and help others – and it is safe and secure."

"It is a place where people with first-hand experiences of mental illness can connect as a community. It is a forum for people to share experiences and

discuss ideas. It's a real step forward. People can join different groups, make connections, suggest ideas for the Network and more."

To find out more, go to www.findingnorthnetwork.com.au

Tony Stevenson added, "It has been 30 years since governments started closing psychiatric institutions ... which was an important move ... with promises that services would be provided in the actual community. The bottom line is, there has not been enough investment in sufficient support services in the community. Bluntly put, it's simply not good enough."

"We want to highlight help is available from GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists, allied health professionals and community mental health organisations. Sadly, there is still way too much stigma and discrimination for people who have a severe mental health condition. This massive gap needs fixing."

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

SOME OF THE KEY POINTS FROM THIS MEDIA RELEASE AT A GLANCE:

- A massive 50% of people with schizophrenia in Australia simply do not receive the support they desperately need.
- 1 in 100 people in Australia currently lives with schizophrenia.
- It is estimated at least half the people in Australia who have severe or complex mental health conditions now do not have any access to support which would help them with their recovery.
- Over 150,000 people with severe and complex mental illness still do not have any kind of support in the community to enable them to live well and independently.
- Up to 50% of people with schizophrenia attempt suicide.
- The life expectancy for people with schizophrenia is up to 19 years less than other people ... and this huge gap is continuing to widen.

- People with serious mental health conditions may end up at a very serious risk of homelessness, social isolation, poor physical health, poverty and with numerous other issues.
- Recent research has revealed people who live with psychosis now experience higher rates of heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, epilepsy, asthma, diabetes, arthritis and more.
- There are many ridiculous myths about schizophrenia ... such as people with schizophrenia are violent; have a split personality; cannot hold onto a job or never recover.
- People wanting support in a safe and secure on-line environment should simply go to www.findingnorthnetwork.com.au.
- Help is available from GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists, allied health professionals and community mental health organisations.