

CO-OCCURRING MENTAL ILLNESS & DRUG MISUSE

September 2009 :: Fact sheet by Hannah Graham, Comorbidity Improved Services Project, Salvation Army Bridge Program & School of Sociology & Social Work, University of Tasmania.

What is 'Comorbidity'?

The word 'comorbidity' refers to lots of different co-occurring medical and social problems, but it is commonly used to describe co-occurring mental illness and drug misuse. Sometimes this is also called 'dual diagnosis'. Drug misuse includes legal and illegal substances, and mental illness includes mental health problems from depression or anxiety through to schizophrenia, bipolar and eating disorders. Yet the way comorbidity affects each person can be different.

Stats & Facts: How Widespread is Comorbidity in Australia?

Comorbidity is more common than you might think:

- Most of the Australian research estimates comorbidity to be approximately 45-60%, which means around half of people who have one problem (mental illness or drug use) also have the other problem at the same time (ABS, 2008; Andrews *et al.*, 2003).
- Of the 16 million Australians aged 16-85 years, almost half (45% or 7.3 million) have had a mental disorder at some point in their lifetime (ABS, 2008). Most common mental illnesses are anxiety (including post-traumatic stress disorder) and depression; schizophrenia is rare.
- Of the 183,900 people who report using illicit drugs daily, almost two thirds (63%) also have a current mental disorder (ABS, 2008).
- In November 2008, the Salvation Army Bridge Program (in Hobart, Launceston & Burnie) collected data on clients' self-reported comorbidity, and the results showed a 63% overlap between alcohol & other drug problems and co-occurring mental health problems.

Want Support or More Info? Useful Comorbidity Contacts in Tasmania

If you're having a mental health or drug related emergency, get medical help quickly

- Very Urgent: ring 000 for an ambulance. Otherwise, make an emergency appointment with your GP.

If you want to find a professional to talk to, then ring one of the following services:

- Mental Health Services Helpline (24hrs): phone 1800 332 388.
- Alcohol & Other Drugs Information Line (24hrs): 1800 811 994.
- Inpatient Withdrawal Unit (Detox): phone 6230 7970.
- Kids Helpline (24hrs) (youth): phone 1800 55 1800. Lifeline (24hrs) (adults): phone 13 11 14.
- Mensline Australia (24hrs) (Counselling & Support for Men): phone 1300 789 978.
- Salvation Army Bridge Program (Alcohol & Drugs Rehabilitation): phone (03) 6278 8140 (Hobart), phone (03) 6331 6760 (Launceston), or phone (03) 6431 9124 (Burnie).
- The Link Youth Health Service (12-24 yrs): phone (03) 6231 2927, email healthhub@thelink.org.au

References

Andrews, G., Issakidis, C., & Slade, T. (2003) 'How Common is Comorbidity?' in Teeson, M., & Proudfoot, H. (eds) (2003) *Comorbid Mental Disorders and Substance Use Disorders: Epidemiology, Prevention and Treatment* Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) *National Survey of Health and Wellbeing 2007: Summary of Results* Canberra.

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