

# Queensland Health Fact sheet 6

## Older persons

### Caring for older people with mental health issues

#### Definitions as used in this fact sheet

**Older Person's Mental Health Services** are public mental health services that are primarily provided for people aged over 65 with mental health problems who experience disability related to ageing. Older Persons Mental Health Services in Queensland are typically multidisciplinary community ("ambulatory") teams that provide consultation-liaison services to hospitals, general practitioners (GP's), residential aged care facilities and extended care inpatient facilities.

**Consumer** is used to describe the person for whom you care. He or she may be a family member, spouse, friend or 'significant other'.

A **case manager** is a clinician employed within a community mental health service to support consumers in a flexible way that best meets their individual needs. The case manager is the person that the consumer will see the most for their mental health care in the public mental health system. The case manager coordinates the consumer's care with other members of the team, who may be allied health specialist such as psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, doctors or trained mental health nurses.

#### Getting help

Your first contact with an Older Persons Mental Health Service may occur in a range of ways. Contact may occur through a telephone call, arranged by a General Practitioner, while in an acute hospital setting, for example an Emergency Department or hospital ward, or at a home visit with a case manager or trained mental health nurses.

You may find this to be an anxious and stressful time. Carers often feel overwhelmed, exhausted and apprehensive when their family member first becomes unwell. You may be unsure how you can offer support for your family member to help them get through this experience. You may also wonder how you can possibly cope. Help is available for you and for your family.

#### What is mental illness?

Mental illness is a general term that refers to a group of illnesses that affect mental functioning. Mental illness, like a physical illness, is treatable. Mental Health problems in older people occur in approximately 20% of older adults with a smaller number living with severe mental illness.

Common triggers for severe mental problems include physical illness, pain or stressful events e.g. the death a friend or spouse. People living with dementia may also develop a mental illness such as anxiety and/or depression.

#### Ask for help for yourself

Supporting someone with a mental illness can be a challenging experience that pushes you along unexpected and unknown paths. Many carers and their families find it challenging to make sense of their feelings and understand the illness. The new situation brings many questions and sometimes it may seem that there are few answers.

#### Helpful strategies to maintain your peace of mind

- Find out everything you can about the illness and the treatment options.
- Ask for help when you need it, including financial assistance.
- Have an action plan in case of crisis.
- Wherever possible, involve the consumer with the mental illness in the planning.
- Be aware of emergency services offered by your local mental health services. Police and ambulance services may also have a role if there is a crisis.
- Keep important phone numbers and information on hand so that you can access them quickly if necessary.
- Ensure that your own physical, social and emotional needs are met so that you can cope better in times of extreme stress and over the longer term. This is very important, even though it may be difficult at times or you may feel guilty.

- Actively seek out support in your role as a carer. Find a carer support group in your area, access counselling and identify understanding friends. Look for and use regular respite care.

Aim to have a balance in your life:

- Take regular exercise and eat nutritious and healthy foods.
- Maintain hobbies or activities that you enjoy and find personally rewarding and satisfying.
- Spend quality time with other family members and friends.
- Nurture a positive outlook and a sense of humour.
- Maintain your spirituality. This is different for everyone and may include formal religion, informal prayer, meditation or other spiritual connections.

### Information and support

Information is available through the Older Persons Mental Health Services, your GP and your local library. The following organisations may also be a helpful source of further information:

- Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre  
[www.commcarelink.health.gov.au](http://www.commcarelink.health.gov.au)  
Ph. 1800 052 222
- Alzheimer's Association of QLD  
[www.alzheimersonline.org/](http://www.alzheimersonline.org/)  
Ph. 1800 639 331
- National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500
- Carers Queensland [www.carersqld.asn.au](http://www.carersqld.asn.au)  
Ph. 1800 242 636
- Mental Health Carers ARAFMI Queensland Inc  
[www.arafmiqld.org](http://www.arafmiqld.org) or Ph 1800 351 881
- Mental Illness Fellowship of Queensland  
[www.mifa.org.au/mifq](http://www.mifa.org.au/mifq)
- Queensland Civil and Administration Tribunal. This website includes information on the Guardianship and Administration Act 2000  
[www.qcat.qld.gov.au](http://www.qcat.qld.gov.au) or Ph. 1300 753 228
- Council of the Ageing (COTA) [www.cota.org.au](http://www.cota.org.au)
- The Department of Veteran's Affairs - At Ease Program 1800 011 046 or  
[www.dva.gov.au/health\\_and\\_wellbeing/mental\\_health](http://www.dva.gov.au/health_and_wellbeing/mental_health)
- The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit 1300 651 192  
[www.eapu.com.au](http://www.eapu.com.au)
- Beyond Blue [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)  
Ph. 1300 22 4636

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**Additional information for carers can be found on the Queensland Health Carers Matter website at [www.health.qld.gov.au/mhcarer](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/mhcarer)**

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