



Healthy Body
Healthy Mind



Get your health right
See a GP
For a physical health check

Information for Service Providers Fact Sheet

Did you now?

Recent research from the *Duty to Care Report* showed that people who experience long term mental illness are more likely to die from preventable physical illness, such as heart disease and cancer, than the general population and that these illnesses often go untreated and undiagnosed.

Raising questions as to whether people who live with mental illness receive an appropriate level of health care for their physical health.

A related report *Who is your GP?* recommends that mental health professionals take responsibility for the physical health of mental health consumers and encourages links between mental health services and GP's. GP's are crucial to the coordination of physical health care in people with mental illness.

During HealthRight Focus Groups, consumers said:

- ✓ *Health professionals are too focused on my mental illness.*
- ✓ *Staff do not understand my needs ... I wouldn't go.*
- ✓ *When depressed I find it very hard to go to doctors- I hate being in the waiting room*
- ✓ *Support to attend appointments is important*

The physical health and well being of people with mental illness is everyone's business, there is a duty to care to look after the physical and mental health of people with mental illness.

Barriers to Health Care

There are a number of factors that create a barrier to accessing physical health care, these include:

- Psycho-social factors such lack of money and support
- Past bad experience with the health system eroding trust
- The impact of mental illness such as low confidence and motivation, disorganisation, paranoia and reduced capacity for self care.
- Missed or delayed diagnosis
- Negative or stigmatising attitudes from carers, health professionals and the wider community. (Mental Health Program Alliance,2004)

There are existing programs that can assist health professionals to work with people with mental illness, however following are 11 tips based on the expressed needs of people with mental illness during the HealthRight Focus Groups and recommendations from the Mental Health Program Alliance (2004) on how to overcome barriers to physical health and preventative health care:



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11 Tips to Welcome People with Mental Illness.

1. Welcome people to your practice and look after their physical health care:
2. Train your staff in mental health awareness so they can understand people with mental illness better.
3. Bulk bill or offer payment options
4. Suggest they bring someone with them and help them explore transport options
5. See people quickly, try not to keep them waiting for too long in the waiting room
6. Explain things carefully and write down details of test or treatments
7. Ask people with mental illness about their physical health and screen for risk factors
8. Build trust, spend time engaging people help them to feel valued and listened to.
9. Follow-up appointments with phone calls and reminders.
10. Prescribe Healthy Lifestyle behaviours and self help tips
11. Promote the mental health benefits of looking after physical health.

Quick Links

Better Outcomes GP Training: www.primarymentalhealth.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=15130

GP Care A common Framework for Treating People with Mental Illness: www.gpcare.org/index.html

Partners In Mind Summary of Resources and Links:

<http://www.partnersinmind.com.au/index.php?action=view&view=13092>

The Red Book : Guidelines for preventive activities in general practice:

www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/redbook

Lifescrpts: Preventative Health Care Screening Test and Resources: www.health.gov.au/lifescrpts

***Become a Mental Health Friendly GP
welcome people with mental illness to your practice***