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Mental health services in New South Wales the focus of new report

The Bureau of Health Information (BHI) has today released its annual healthcare performance report, focused this year on mental health services in NSW.

For the first time in this report series, *Healthcare in Focus* examines the performance of the NSW health system through a specific lens – the use and experiences of health services by people with lived experience of mental health issues.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said the report looks at different aspects of the care journey including care provided in the community, emergency departments (EDs) and inpatient settings.

“Almost all adults with a mental health issue in NSW (95%) had a regular doctor or place of care which is important to help people access the services they need,” said Dr Watson. “More than nine in 10 (94%) also gave positive ratings about the medical care they received from their regular doctor.

“While around seven in 10 adults with a mental health issue were able to get help from a health professional when they needed, they found it much more difficult than adults without a mental health issue to access out-of-hours care.”

When it came to EDs, the report shows mental health-related presentations grew faster than overall ED presentations, particularly for young people.

“Over five years, mental health-related ED presentations increased by 18%, compared with 11% overall growth,” said Dr Watson. “Just over half of mental health-related ED presentations were for people under 35 years old (53%).”

People with a mental health issue were much more likely to arrive by ambulance, more likely to be assessed in the ED to ‘emergency’ and ‘urgent’ categories and more likely to visit EDs often.

Treatment started on time for 70% of mental health-related ED presentations in NSW, compared with 75% of presentations for other reasons.

“People presenting to EDs with mental health-related issues waited longer for treatment, spent more time in EDs and reported less positive experiences of care,” said Dr Watson.

Inpatient activity also increased in specialised mental health units at a faster rate than overall admitted patient activity, and those staying overnight in these units were more likely to be young.

Three-quarters of people admitted to hospital for a mental health-related issue were contacted by a community mental health service within one week of discharge.

Healthcare in Focus: People’s use and experiences of mental health services in NSW presents a range of other measures of mental health care, including looking at services provided to population groups such as people living in rural and remote locations, Aboriginal people, women in maternity care, and those receiving cancer treatment.

“This report is our contribution to mental health services in NSW, putting this information in the hands of the community, healthcare system managers and policymakers to strengthen accountability and support system-wide improvements,” said Dr Watson.

The *Healthcare in Focus* report and associated information products are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au