

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Mental illness places a heavy toll on affected individuals and families across NSW – and its influence is far-reaching for society as a whole.

In NSW, mental disorders were the primary reason for 15% of acute bed days [60,000 overnight hospitalisations and 800,000 hospital bed days in the financial year, July 2010 – June 2011] (*Healthcare in focus 2012: How well does NSW perform?*, 2012).

It is estimated that 45.5% of Australians aged 16-85 years (7.3 million people) experience a mental disorder over their lifetime. (AIHW)

During 2010–11 in Australia, \$309 per person was spent on mental health-related services. For NSW, this expenditure totals almost \$2.3 billion. (AIHW)

Patient Perspectives

The *Patient Perspectives* series draws information from the [NSW Patient Survey Program](#), offering an insight into what patients are saying about their healthcare experience. It presents a unique opportunity to measure aspects of the health system that can only be captured from a patient perspective.

The *Patient Perspectives* report is based on responses from the NSW Health Patient Survey, February 2010 and February 2011.

- *Volume 1, Inpatient Care* is based on responses from 1,028 users of inpatient mental health services (response rate is 28%)
- *Volume 2, Community Mental Health* is based on responses from 3,956 users of community mental health services (response rate is 26%).

In terms of international benchmarking, the report found similar patterns of results for NSW and England's National Health Service. This was the only other health service with comparable survey results from mental health patients.

The report presents a range of responses for individual survey questions and for aspects of care. Aspects of care are groups of questions with a common theme. They include Access, Comfort, Continuity, Coordination, Family involvement, Health outcome, Hygiene, Information, Overall experience, Respect, and Support.

The report looks at:

- Comparisons with other patient groups
- Overall ratings of care
- Aspects of care: variation across NSW by Local Health District
- Aspects of care: variation across NSW by hospital/ facility group
- What is done well ... and what needs improving?
- Associations between elements of care experience and overall ratings
- Results for Aboriginal people: inpatient mental health services, and community mental health
- International comparisons
- Outcomes from mental health experiences (Volume 2, Community Mental Health)

Key findings Volume 1, Inpatient Care

NSW mental health inpatients report most positively on their experience of care in areas such as help being available, respect for the patient and hygiene.

Results from the survey show:

- 79% of people using inpatient services said that they knew who they could call when help was needed
- 65% of users of inpatient services agreed that staff showed respect by not talking in front of them as if they weren't there
- 65% said that staff displayed good hygiene by washing their hands and
- 54% said that emergency department care was well organised.

Users of mental health inpatient services report less positively in regards to ensuring they have a say in refusing treatment, information on side effects and availability of professionals.

More specifically, the survey results showed:

- 21% of patients said they could refuse a specific type of medicine or treatment*
- 30% said they were completely informed about side effects of medication
- 30% said they were provided with complete information about danger signs to look out for after discharge
- 10% rated the availability of professionals as 'excellent'.

*It should be noted that up to half of mental health inpatients are involuntary admissions under the NSW Mental Health Act. Refusal of treatment may not always be appropriate.

Volume 1, Inpatient Care examined the association between aspects of care and overall ratings. These findings provide valuable information for the NSW health system.

When people rated their overall care as excellent, they generally responded positively to questions covering teamwork, counselling or treatment, food items, staff responsiveness and nurse courtesy.

When people rated their overall care as fair or poor, they generally responded negatively to questions about teamwork, counselling or treatment, staff courtesy, being treated with respect and dignity, and signage.

Key findings Volume 2, Community Mental Health

Community mental health users were asked about outcomes in their daily life as a result of the services they received. This insight into outcomes contributes to a 'whole of person' perspective of the patient experience, giving us information on how people felt their treatment effected their lives.

- 54% said overall, they were definitely helped by the services they received
- 45% said they were definitely able to get along better with the people close to them
- 42% said they were definitely better able to deal with daily problems
- 36% said they are definitely better in their work/school or other usual activity.

The NSW Health Patient Survey asked users of community mental health services four patient-reported outcome questions (PROMs).

PROMs describe a patient's own personal experience about their health and the impact that treatments have on their quality of life. Gauging the impact that services have on patient reported outcomes is increasingly seen as essential in performance measurement and reporting efforts.

The findings (see infographic, *Community Mental Health outcomes and associated questions*) suggest that in order to achieve positive patient outcomes, responsiveness; providing help with coordination; providing reassurance and support about patients' ability to recover; and communication are crucially important elements of community mental health services.

Users of NSW community mental health services report most positively on their experience of care in areas such as cleanliness and comfort, respect, dignity and waiting times for treatment.

The survey results show that 72% of NSW community mental health patients said that when they attended a clinic and met with staff, that it was clean and comfortable.

The survey results also reveal:

- 74% said that health professionals did not talk in front of them as if they were not there
- 71% agreed that that they were treated with dignity and respect
- 68% said that they did not have to wait long for services to start.

Community mental health patients report low scores when asked about medication and the inclusion of family and friends in their treatment.

- 34% of community mental health patients said they could refuse a specific type of medicine or treatment*
- 38% said staff told them about the danger signs about their condition to watch for
- 38% said they were told about side effects of medicine
- 40% said that staff spoke to them about whether to include their family in counselling or treatment.

*When reading these results, it should be noted that community mental health care includes involuntary care as a result of forensic orders under the NSW Mental Health Act. It is not always appropriate to allow treatment refusal.

Volume 2, Community Mental Health examined the association between aspects of care and overall ratings. These findings provide valuable information for the NSW health system.

When people rated their overall care as excellent, they generally responded positively to questions about the courtesy of healthcare professionals, teamwork, availability of healthcare professionals, responsiveness and helpfulness of staff.

For survey respondents who rated their overall care as fair or poor, they generally responded negatively to questions about the courtesy of healthcare professionals, teamwork, reassurance about the ability to recover, trust in health professionals and information about danger signals regarding their condition.

About the Bureau of Health Information

The role of the Bureau is to provide independent reports to government, the community and healthcare professionals on the performance of the NSW public health system, including safety and quality, effectiveness, efficiency, cost and responsiveness of the system to the health needs of the people of NSW.

About the NSW Patient Survey Program

Formerly managed by the NSW Ministry of Health, the survey program transferred to the Bureau in 2012. *Patient Perspectives: Mental health services in NSW public facilities, Volume 1, Inpatient Care* and *Volume 2, Community Mental Health* is the first report in the series.

Patient surveys are important in the evaluation of healthcare systems and performance. How patients report on the care they received provides valuable information, that when viewed with other performance measures, adds to a whole of person view of healthcare.

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