

Experts calling for improved use of 'tele-tech' solutions to tackle Australia's mental health crisis

Less than 1-in-6 Aussies in psychological distress seeking help: new data

Doctors, patients and seven-time world surfing and wellness champion, Layne Beachley AO, are joining forces today (August 18, 2021) to urge ALL Australians to take care of their mental health, with new data revealing less than one-in-six people with psychological distress are seeking professional help.¹

Having recently battled a slew of natural disasters, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our population is facing a mental health crisis, with reports of rising psychological distress among Australians facing, and previously free from, mental health issues.¹

Their urgent plea is coinciding with an article just published in *MJA InSight+*, reinforcing the critical need for innovative digital solutions to ensure every Australian has timely and affordable access to professional mental health support, no matter what their situation, location or socio-economic status.

According to article co-author, Intensive Care Specialist at Northern Beaches Hospital, and CEO and Founder of virtual mental health clinic, My Mirror, Dr Matthew Zoeller, Sydney, there are still many substantial barriers to overcome to enable Australians to gain access to professional mental health services.

"Despite the extensive work still underway to address the misconceptions surrounding mental health,^{2,3} the ongoing stigma associated with seeking and receiving mental health support² poses a major obstacle for many Australians in psychological distress.

"However, stigma is just one of many challenges facing those affected. Time, cost and geographical location are also severely compromising Australians' access to mental health support.^{4,5} This is especially true for those living in regional and remote areas, who may be required to travel to major cities or towns to access professional mental healthcare," said Dr Zoeller.

"It is therefore crucial that we identify an immediate solution to address this ongoing crisis, and adapt our currently inadequate mental healthcare system.

"Innovative, 'tele-tech' models of care combine secure online platforms with next-generation videoconferencing technologies, to provide entirely virtual support. Improved uptake of these digital healthcare models is key to overcoming these barriers, to ensure ALL Australians can access professional mental health support, when, and where they need it,"^{6,7} Dr Zoeller said.

In a bid to improve access to timely and affordable, expert mental health support for every Australian experiencing any level of distress across the spectrum, Dr Zoeller founded My Mirror – an Australian, digital mental health clinic that strives to normalise the process of talking to a mental healthcare professional. My Mirror is the professional psychology partner to **Layne's Awake Academy – an Australian, online portal comprising a series of wellness courses.**

"As a mental wellness champion, I've had my share of mental health-related issues. I've survived depression and serious injuries that formed part of the emotional roller-coaster that was my 19-year-long professional surfing career.

"Mental health care requires a holistic approach, including the development of a strong support network, and professional psychological care," said Layne.

"I'm partnering with My Mirror because it combines innovation with the professional expertise required to change the way Australians engage with psychological support."

Chief Psychologist and co-Founder of My Mirror, and article co-author, Ms Kate Blundell, Sydney, emphasises there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effectively managing mental health.

"Each person has a unique set of needs and circumstances, which may evolve over time. We must therefore, be able to tailor mental health services to meet today's societal and behavioural conditions," said Ms Blundell.

"We recognise that our current environment has put growing pressures on face-to-face psychological services, resulting in increased waiting times. It is important to recognise the quality and access that the digital mental health space can now provide.

"Wherever you are in your personal journey – if you're a new parent, or juggling kids at home, if you're overwhelmed at work, or feeling unusually anxious during lockdown, please reach out now for support," Ms Blundell said.

"Consider that there is now the option to speak to an accredited psychologist virtually, from the comfort of your home, at a time convenient to you, regardless of your situation, location or socioeconomic status."

Medical receptionist and nursing student, Esther, 24, Brisbane, found herself "spiralling" mentally after succumbing to a physical illness she had previously battled for more than a year. She spoke to her GP, an in-clinic psychologist, and a few mental health hotlines, but failed to obtain the support she required. After further research, Esther came across My Mirror.

"I was able to book in almost immediately, and was grateful to be matched with a psychologist who suited my situation and personality. I also enjoyed attending the session from the discretion and comfort of my own bedroom," said Esther.

"People shouldn't be afraid to reach out for help. Professional support can give you the confidence to regain control of how you're feeling, which is very empowering."

Our nation's mental health

One in five Australians aged over 16 experience a mental illness in any given year,⁸ with mental and substance use disorders comprising around 12 per cent of our nation's total burden of disease.⁹ In 2017-18, 13 per cent of Australian adults experienced high, or very high levels of psychological distress.¹⁰ However, recent data revealed around 20 per cent of Australians reported experiencing high, or very high levels of psychological distress in 2020/21, representing a significant increase.¹

Younger Australians (aged 18 – 34 years) are also in distress, with almost one in three reporting high, or very high levels of psychological distress, compared to 18 per cent, and 10 per cent of those aged 35 – 64, and 65+, respectively.¹

Psychotherapy is proven to be an effective management and treatment option for many psychological and mental illnesses, and may be delivered in-person or virtually. Concerningly however, a significant proportion of our population who stand to benefit from psychotherapy, currently lack access.⁴

Telehealth is a safe, timely, convenient, and effective option for increasing every Australian's access to mental health care, particularly for those who face logistical, financial, and stigma-related barriers to receiving in-person treatment.¹¹

About My Mirror

My Mirror is a digital mental health clinic committed to ensuring that every Australian has timely and affordable access to professional mental health support. The digital clinic aims to deliver timely, evidence-based, cost-effective, psychological treatment to anyone, anywhere, without the need for a clinical diagnosis, referral, or waiting time, 21 hours per day, seven days a week.

My Mirror's extensive network of individually recruited and registered clinical and general psychologists, are tele-health trained across the My Mirror digital platform, to deliver a professional (evidence-based), clinically governed, and technologically seamless service. Each individual has ownership of, and access to, their digital portal indefinitely, including session information, education and resource tools, plus assessment tracking over time – enabling a tailored journey and outcome for each individual patient, with their end point in mind, and not just the clinician's.

Based on a stepped care model, individuals can be technologically matched, or choose from a wide network of accredited psychologists aligned with their individual requirements and preferences at that particular point in time. All information used to support the clinical journey is end-to-end encrypted on-shore, to ensure complete privacy and security.

To learn more about My Mirror, or to book a consultation with an accredited psychologist, head to [MyMirror.com.au](https://www.mymirror.com.au). Follow @MyMirrorAU across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. ends#

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