

Common terms and definitions

Sometimes, the meaning of common terms in mental health can be misunderstood and concepts can be mistaken for each other. Below is a selection of common terms and their definitions to familiarise yourself with:

Comorbidity

Comorbidity is when a person has more than one illness or condition at the same time.

Diagnosis

A diagnosis is given when a qualified mental health professional (e.g. doctor, psychologist or psychiatrist) has completed an assessment and identified that the person has a specific condition or disorder. A diagnosis can only be given by a person qualified to make the diagnosis.

Mental health

Mental health refers to a sense of overall wellbeing, it's a positive feeling of being well in ourselves and of being able to achieve the things we want to.

Mental health issues

Mental health issues are when someone is struggling emotionally; they may experience some symptoms of depression and/or anxiety, but it does not meet the criteria for a diagnosis.

Mental health literacy

Simply put, mental health literacy refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental illness that help individuals recognise, manage and prevent illness.

Mental ill-health

Mental ill-health can be used to refer to both mental illness and mental health issues.

Mental illness

Mental illness is a diagnosed disorder that has a significant impact on the person.

Social and emotional wellbeing

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples prefer to use this term instead of mental health as it aligns better with a holistic view of health and mental health. The term 'social and emotional wellbeing' is used to describe a person's social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing.

Stigma

Stigma can happen when people are scared of something or someone that they feel is different. In relation to mental ill-health, stigma is when someone is looked upon badly, simply because of their symptoms.

Suicide

Suicide is when someone purposely causes their own death.