

FACT SHEET

What is mental health nursing?



Mental health nurses work with people who experience mental health issues, in many different capacities to support them towards wellness. This may involve managing the illnesses within the context of daily life, encouraging and assisting the person to set and achieve life goals, undertaking assessments and providing psychological therapy.

Mental health nursing is a specialised field of nursing whose main focus is on a person's subjective experiences.

Mental health nursing's primary tool to understand a patient's inner world forms part of the therapeutic nurse-patient relationship. Mental health nursing focuses on the mental and physical health of their clients and how they relate to the world.

Mental health nurses work with their clients to promote psychological well-being and emotional health and improve relationships with others. Mental health nurses' qualifications are based in the biological sciences. An important part of the role is to monitor the biological dimensions of mental illness through behavioural observations and including medication monitoring.

In line with current trends and reforms, mental health nurses protect patients' rights and support their families, carers and significant others. This role of patient advocate is integral to mental health nursing

Education

With an undergraduate degree in nursing you can register to practice as a nurse and work in most mental health settings. However, to become a specialist, most nurses go on to study mental health at Graduate Diploma or Masters Level. Specialist mental health nurses commonly also undertake additional training in specific psychological therapies.

What do mental health nurses actually do?

Mental health nursing is a specialised branch of nursing with a focus on the care of people with mental health problems, such as:

- anxiety
- depression
- addictions
- eating disorders
- psychosis
- crisis intervention

Mental health nurses...

- work closely with people from all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds;
- work collaboratively with a range of other health professionals including doctors, psychologists and other allied health professionals as part of a multidisciplinary team;
- work in a variety of settings such as community health, consultation-liaison (in emergency departments and general hospitals), private practice, primary care e.g. with GPs, mental health units, forensic services and universities;
- develop a range of skills such as mental health promotion and screening, prevention, teaching, specialist counselling and psychotherapy, medication management, direct nursing care.

Where do mental health nurses work?

Mental health nurses work in specialist mental health and generalist settings across the age and illness spectrum - from perinatal and infant mental health, child and adolescent mental health, adult and older adult mental health - and across health promotion, early intervention and primary practice, community-based (acute, medium and longer-term), generalist inpatient (e.g. emergency departments) and acute, sub-acute and forensic inpatient settings. Specialised programs may focus on people who experience particular mental health conditions.

What is a Credentialed Mental Health Nurse™?

The Credential for Practice Program® is an initiative of the ACMHN and has established the only nationally consistent recognition for specialist mental health nurses in Australia. The Credential recognises the skills, expertise and experience of nurses who are practising as specialist mental health nurses. It demonstrates to employers, professional colleagues, consumers and carers that an individual nurse has achieved the professional standard for practice in mental health nursing.

How can I find a Mental Health Nurse?

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses can provide you with information on specialist mental health nurses in your area.



Mental Health Nurses (MHNs) are experts in working with people who experience mental illness. They work collaboratively with consumers, carers and other health professionals, across a range of health and mental health settings. MHNs take a holistic approach and are skilled in assessment, treatment and ongoing support of the person, with a focus on achieving wellness.