

# HEALTHY MINDS



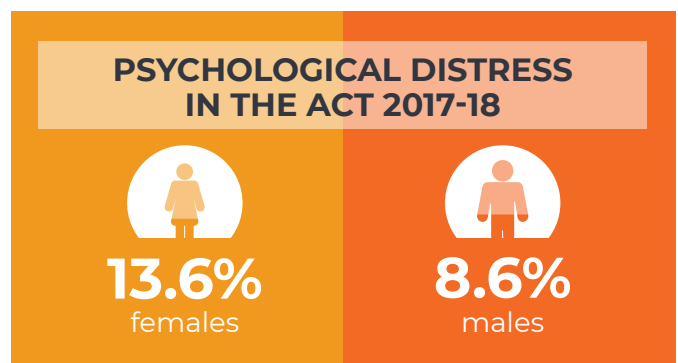
Positive mental health is associated with creativity and productivity, increased learning, positive social relationships, as well as improved physical health and life expectancy. Poor mental health adversely affects physical health, quality of life and overall functioning, which, in turn, affects families, friends, workplaces, and the broader community.

## Challenges and Opportunities

### Psychological Distress

Between 2014-15 and 2017-18, prevalence of high or very high levels of psychological distress in ACT residents aged 18 years and over has remained reasonably stable (2014-15: 10.8%; 2017-18: 11.0%) [ABS NHS].

More women than men experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress in both 2014-15 (13.2% and 8.3%, respectively) and 2017-18 (13.6% and 8.6%, respectively); however, there was little change in the proportions for males and females or across age groups [ABS NHS].



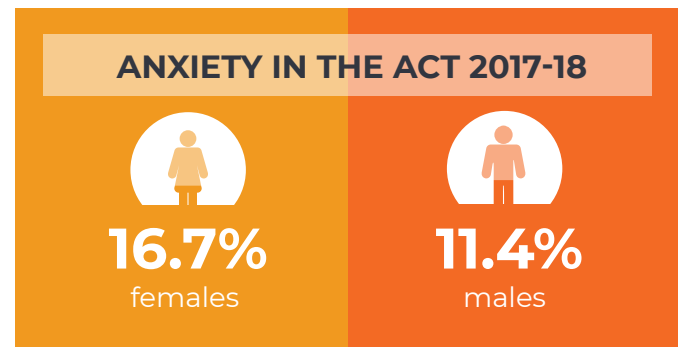
Source: ABS NHS

### Anxiety & Depression

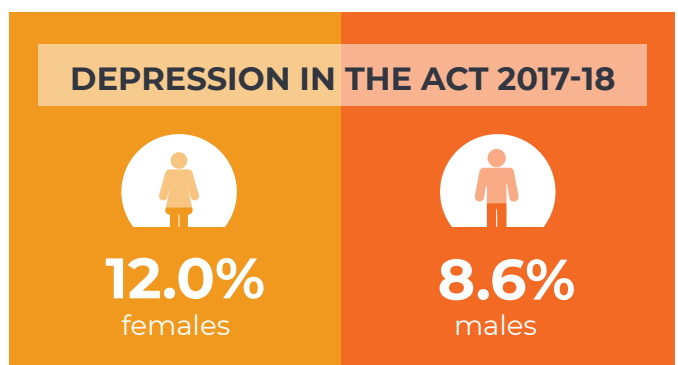
Mental illness is a leading cause of burden of disease in the ACT. Many Canberrans experience a mental illness at some stage of their lives and anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorder.

Anxiety disorders accounted for 5.1% of the burden of disease in the ACT in 2015, which was higher than the national figure of 3.2%, and depressive disorders contributed 2.7% compared to 2.9% for Australia. [AIHW 2019, Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2015].

In 2017-18, one in five (20.8%) Canberrans aged 18 years and over had a mental or behavioural condition, one in seven (13.9%) had an anxiety-related condition and one in ten (10.3%) reported depression or feelings of depression [ABS NHS 2017-18].



Source: ABS NHS



Source: ABS NHS

Recent data show that ACT females aged 18 years and over are more likely than their male counterparts to report an anxiety-related condition (16.7% compared with 11.4%) and more likely to experience depression or feelings of depression (12.0% compared with 8.6%) [ABS NHS 2017-18].

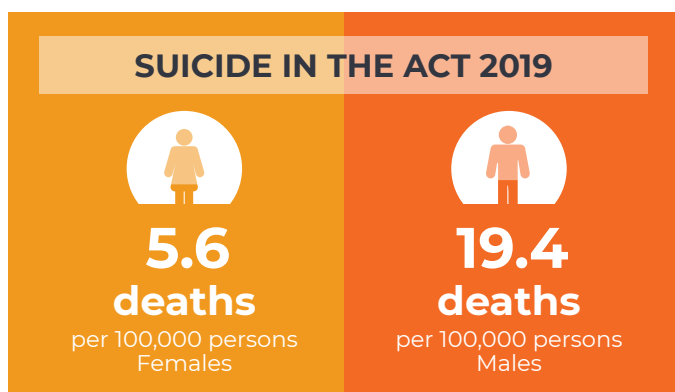
Canberrans aged 25-44 years are most likely to report an anxiety-related condition (15.3%) and 45-64-year-olds are most likely to experience depression or feelings of depression (13.8%) [ABS NHS 2017-18].

## Suicide

While relatively uncommon, suicide is a major public health issue because of its devastating impacts on individuals, families, friends, and communities.

In 2019, the suicide rate for ACT males (19.4 deaths by suicide per 100,000 persons) was more than three times higher than that for ACT females (5.6 deaths by suicide per 100,000 persons) [ABS Causes of Death]<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> National comparison data is available on the HealthStats website



Source: ABS Causes of Death

## Self-harm

Self-harm relates to any behaviour involving intentionally causing pain or injury to oneself.

Of the 603 hospitalisations for self-harm reported in ACT residents for 2017-18, three-quarters (73.8%) were females and half (48.1%) were aged 10-24 years.

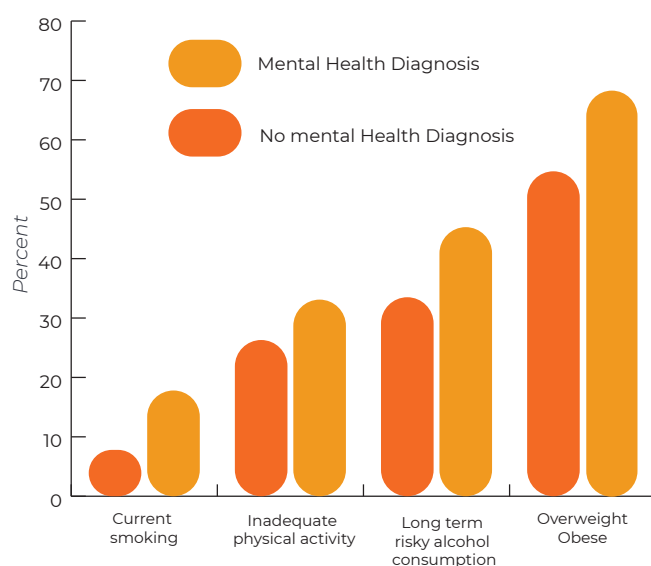
Between 2008-09 and 2017-18, hospitalisations for self-harm increased for Canberrans aged 10-24 years but remained relatively stable in other age groups.

## Link between mental health and physical health

Generally, people with mental illness have worse health outcomes than the rest of the population, including a significant reduction in life expectancy.

In 2016-18 in the ACT, people with a mental health diagnosis were more likely than people with no mental health diagnosis to report preventable risk factors for chronic disease, such as smoking (17.8% and 7.8%, respectively), inadequate physical activity (33.1% and 26.3%), long-term risky alcohol use (45.3% and 33.5%) and overweight/obesity (68.2% and 54.7%) [ACT GHS].

Selected chronic disease risk factors and mental health diagnosis\*, ACT residents, 2016-2018

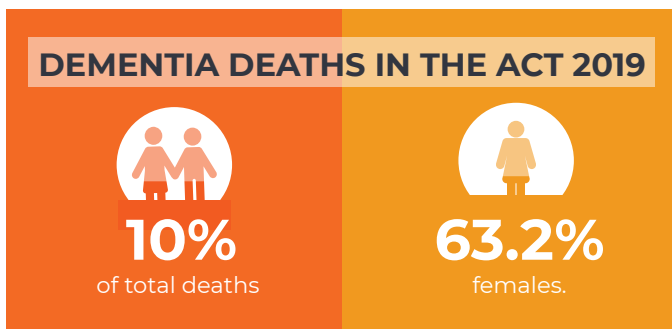


Source: ACT GHS

\*anxiety, depression, a stress-related problem or any other mental health problem

## Dementia

Dementia is a group of conditions, including Alzheimer's disease, characterised by a deterioration of memory, thinking, and the ability to perform everyday tasks. The condition is degenerative and irreversible and mainly affects older people, but it is not a normal part of ageing.



Source: ABS Causes of Death

Of the 2,033 deaths recorded in Canberrans during 2019, nearly 10% were caused by dementia. Females accounted for the majority of deaths due to dementia (63.2%) and it was the most common cause of death for women [ABS Causes of Death].

Between 2006 and 2018, the age-standardised death rate for dementia in the ACT significantly increased by an average of 2.3% per year [CODURF]<sup>1</sup>. With an ageing population, this trend is likely to continue because the most significant risk factor for dementia is ageing.

Although there is no certain way to prevent dementia, the largest health gains could be achieved by reducing the prevalence of vascular risk factors that are trending upwards, namely diabetes and obesity. There is good evidence, too, that a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of developing dementia as people age. Risk factors include physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, unhealthy diets, tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, diabetes, and midlife hypertension.

<sup>1</sup> National comparison data is available on the HealthStats website

## Achievements

### Mental health activities

The ACT Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan 2019–2024 was jointly developed by Capital Health Network, ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD), Canberra Health Services, Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and peak non-government organisations.

In recognition of the importance of developing healthy minds and addressing mental health concerns early in life, the Office for Mental Health & Wellbeing undertook a review of the mental health and wellbeing of Children and Young People in the ACT. The Office heard from a wide range of young people and their families about the challenges and issues they face, and recommendations were sought from the community. As a result, an Online Youth Navigation Portal is being developed for the ACT to enable easier access to the supports and services. This was also a recommendation from the Youth Advisory Council. The Office has commenced a project in partnership with the Capital Health Network and the ACT Youth Coalition to consider the needs of young people with moderate to severe mental health concerns.

### Suicide Prevention activities

In recognition of the impact of suicide across the community, the ACT Government partnered with Black Dog Institute and Capital Health Network to implement a three-year multifaceted approach to suicide prevention using BDI's LifeSpan Integrated Suicide Prevention Framework; this concludes in June 2021.

LifeSpan is an evidence-based approach to integrated suicide prevention, which aims to build a safety net for the community by connecting and coordinating new and existing interventions and programs and building the capacity of the community to better support people facing suicide crisis. It combines nine strategies, with strong evidence for suicide prevention, into one community-led approach incorporating health, education, frontline services, business, and the community.



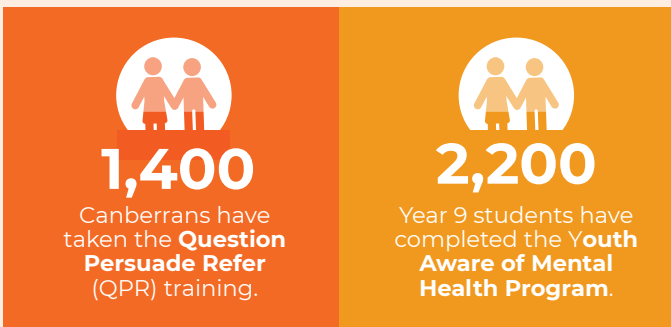
One initiative included in Lifespan is the Question Persuade Refer (QPR) online gatekeeper training program, which has been widely promoted by ACTHD and CHN through social media and other channels. QPR is a suicide prevention intervention that teaches lay and professional gatekeepers to recognise and respond positively to someone exhibiting suicide warning signs and behaviours.

Over 1,400 Canberrans have taken up this training opportunity, which is also being promoted in schools through ACT Education and workplaces via Healthier Work.

Another initiative aligned with LifeSpan is the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) Program, which is being delivered in schools across the ACT to educate and engage young people in discussions about mental health; over 2,200 Year 9 students have now completed this peer support program.

An ACT LifeSpan Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group provides advice and guidance on culturally appropriate and safe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention strategies, as well as guiding the implementation of these strategies for the ACT.

The Lifespan three-year project is being evaluated, and this evaluation will inform an ongoing multifaceted approach to suicide prevention in the ACT. The Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing is continuing to monitor the mental health of the community.



**Glossary:** ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics; ACT Australian Capital Territory; ACTPANS ACT Physical Activity & Nutrition Survey; AIHW Australian Institute of Health & Welfare; ASSAD Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol & Drug survey; BOD Burden of Disease; CODURF Cause of Death Unit Record File; GHS General Health Survey; MPDC Maternal Perinatal Data Collection; NDSHS National Drug Strategy Household Survey; NHMRC National Health and Medical Research Council, NHS National Health Survey.

Data included in this report are the most recent available at the time of publication. For more information, see: [stats.health.act.gov.au](https://stats.health.act.gov.au)