Community sentiment survey

**Key findings,
November 2019**

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Background

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System engaged Wallis Market and Social Research (Wallis) to conduct a community sentiment survey about attitudes and perceptions regarding people living with mental health challenges and Victoria's mental health system.

This is just one of the ways the Commission has sought to gather information and evidence to inform its work, along with community consultations, submissions, public hearings, stakeholder roundtables, and research.

Wallis surveyed 3,000 Victorians in July 2019. This was complemented by five focus group discussions across Victoria with 46 people. Two of the focus groups were held in Richmond, and one each in Frankston, Traralgon and Warrnambool.

The terms mental health challenges and mental health conditions were used by Wallis while conducting surveys and focus groups, and that terminology is reflected here.

This document provides a high-level summary of the key findings from the work undertaken by Wallis.

The Commission recognises the limitations inherent in market-research methodology, and that there may be some positive attitude bias because the work was conducted on behalf of the Commission. Survey results should be read with these limitations in mind.
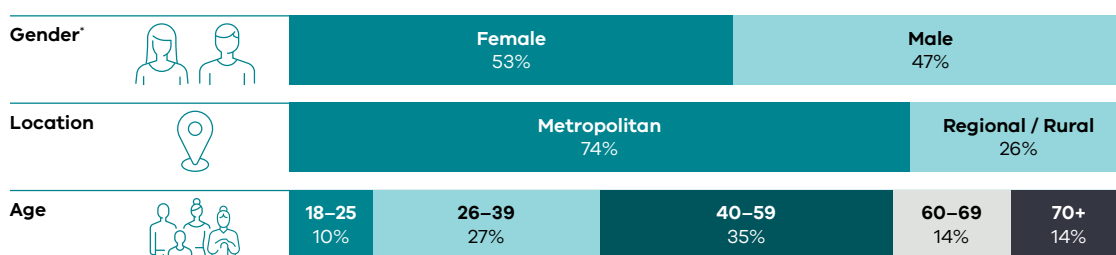
The Commission also acknowledges that this survey directly raises the issue of stigma, which has been done with the intent to understand current attitudes and perceptions of the Victorian population.

Survey respondents

Summary of the 3,000 survey respondents by gender, age and location. Respondent demographics align with Victorian population demographics.

Figure 1: Respondent characteristics

|					
Gender*		Female 53%		Male 47%	
Location		Metropolitan 74%			Regional / Rural 26%
Age		18–25 10%	26–39 27%	40–59 35%	60–69 14% / 70+ 14%

*people were also able to select self-described gender but there were no respondents.

Awareness and perceptions

More than three quarters (78%) of people who took the survey reported that they have experienced mental health challenges, either themselves or someone close to them.

Figure 2: Respondents who have experienced mental health challenges, either themselves or someone close to them

78%
of respondents have experienced*
mental health conditions
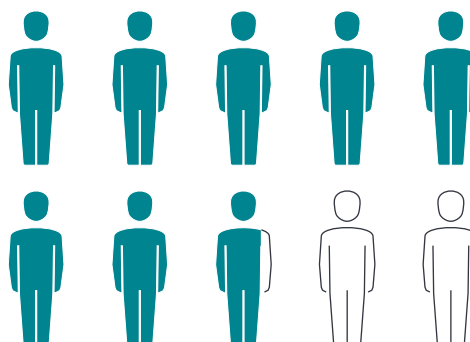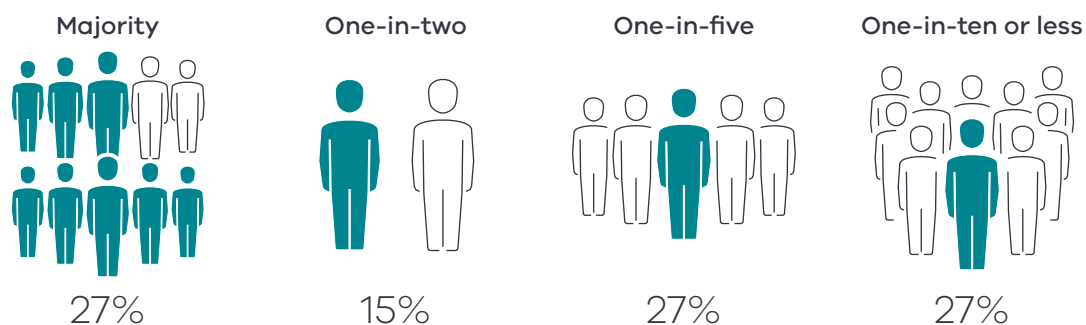
*Either themselves, or someone close to them

When asked to estimate how many Victorians will experience mental health challenges in their lifetime, more than half of respondents said one-in-five or fewer people.

People who have experienced mental health challenges, either personally or someone close to them, were more likely to think that a majority of people will experience mental health challenges in their lifetime (31%).

The figure below presents findings in relation to survey respondents' perceptions of the number of people who will experience mental health challenges. It does not indicate the actual number of people who will experience mental health challenges in their lifetime.

Figure 3: Perceived proportion of people who will experience mental health challenges at some point in their lives

Majority	One-in-two	One-in-five	One-in-ten or less
27%	15%	27%	27%

Note: the percentages above do not total 100% due to not stated values.

The most commonly reported mental health challenges experienced by people, either themselves or someone close to them, are:

- Depression (80%)
- Bipolar Disorder (32%)
- Anxiety (69%)
- Drug or alcohol addiction (28%)
- Stress (44%)

Attitudes

More than nine in 10 (91%) respondents agree that Victorians need to talk more openly about mental health. There was also strong agreement that Victorians need to adopt a far more tolerant attitude regarding people living with mental health challenges.

Respondents who have experienced mental health challenges (either their own or someone close to them) were more likely to agree with each of the statements below.

There was also wide agreement in the focus group discussions that mental health is becoming a more important topic in the community. In many cases there was also a view that the levels of acceptance and tolerance within the community are improving.
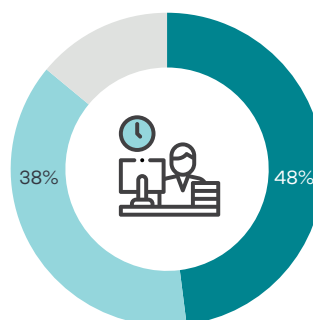
Figure 4: Attitudes regarding mental health

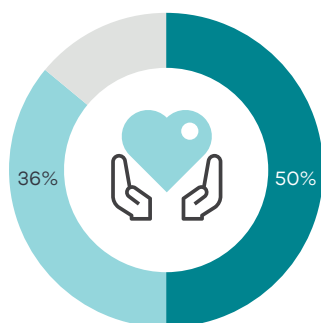As Victorians we need to talk more openly about mental health conditions

34%   57%
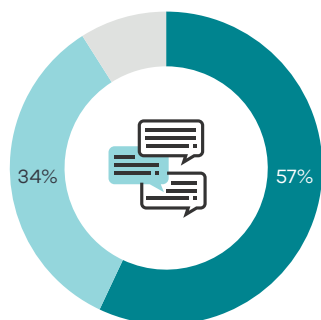
91% Net Agree

Employers need to set a good example of how to support people living with mental health conditions
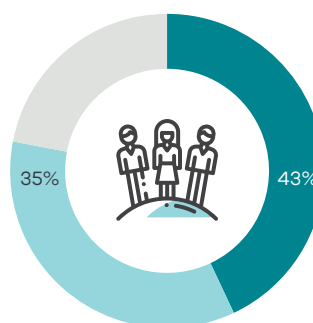
38%   48%

87% Net Agree

We (as Victorians) need to adopt a far more tolerant attitude regarding people living with mental health conditions in our society

36%   50%

86% Net Agree

As far as possible, mental health services should be provided in the community, rather than in hospital

35%   43%

78% Net Agree

● Strongly Agree   ● Agree

Social interactions

The survey showed that the willingness of people to engage in social interactions with someone living with a mental health condition varies based on both the mental illness and the nature of the interaction.

Figure 5: Proportion of respondents 'definitely willing' to interact with people living with mental health conditions, by condition
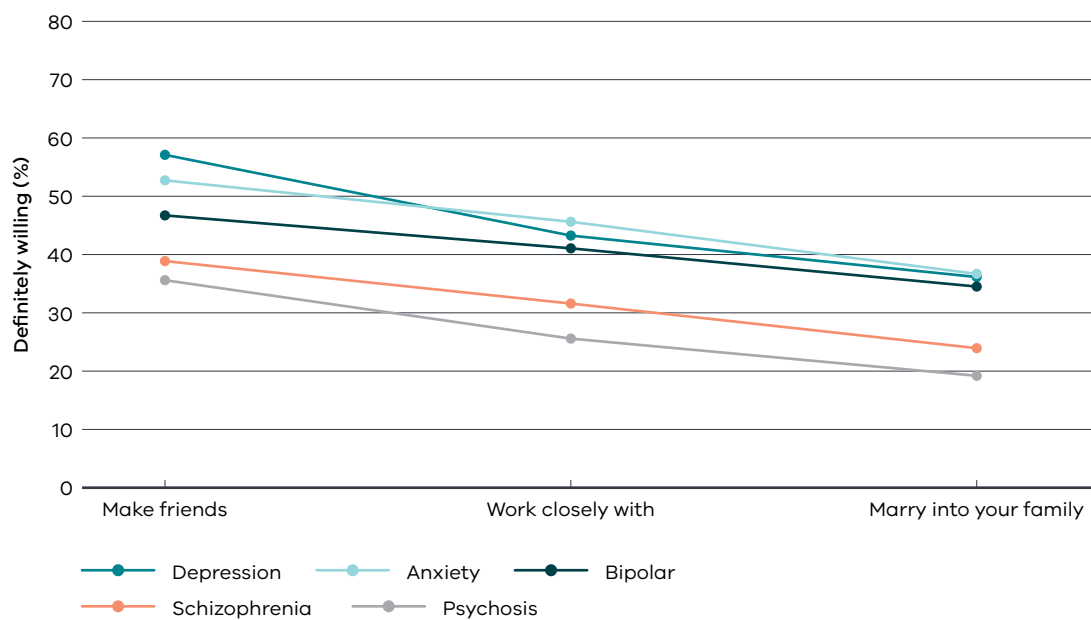
Workplaces

A strong majority of respondents agreed that people living with mental health conditions should be supported to participate in the workplace. And 87% of people believe employers need to set a good example of how to support someone living with a mental health condition.

Figure 6: Agreement with statements about people living with mental health conditions, by condition

	% Agree				
	Depression	Anxiety	Bipolar	Psychosis	Schizophrenia
People with [Condition] should be supported to participate in the workplace	89%	90%	87%	86%	85%

However, a substantial proportion of respondents also thought that people living with mental health conditions are unlikely to perform well at their jobs, and are likely to face workplace discrimination.

**Figure 7:** Perceptions of experiences of those living with mental health conditions

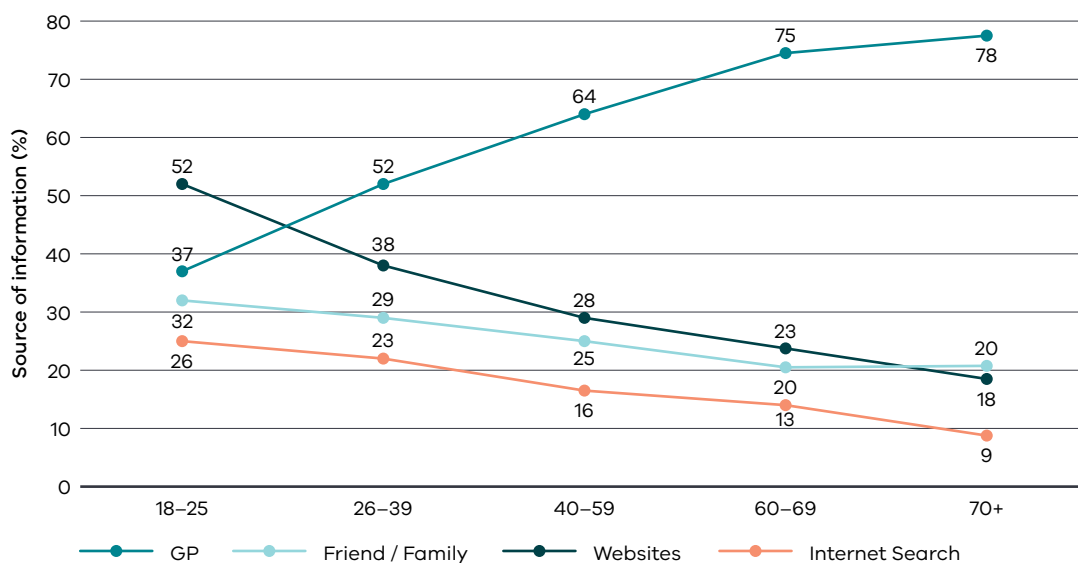|	% Agree				
	Depression	Anxiety	Bipolar	Psychosis	Schizophrenia
People with [Condition] would experience discrimination in the workplace	61%	64%	62%	78%	77%
People with [Condition] are unlikely to perform adequately at their jobs	52%	42%	32%	53%	43%

Services and support

Around three-quarters (76%) of survey respondents who had experienced mental health challenges sought help. Among respondents who had someone else close to them experience mental health challenges, a similar proportion believed that their loved one had accessed some form of help (78%).

Figure 8: Top five sources of help sought by those experiencing mental health challenges

General Practioner	Clinical Psychologist	Psychiatrist	Family	Counsellor
58%	35%	33%	24%	23%
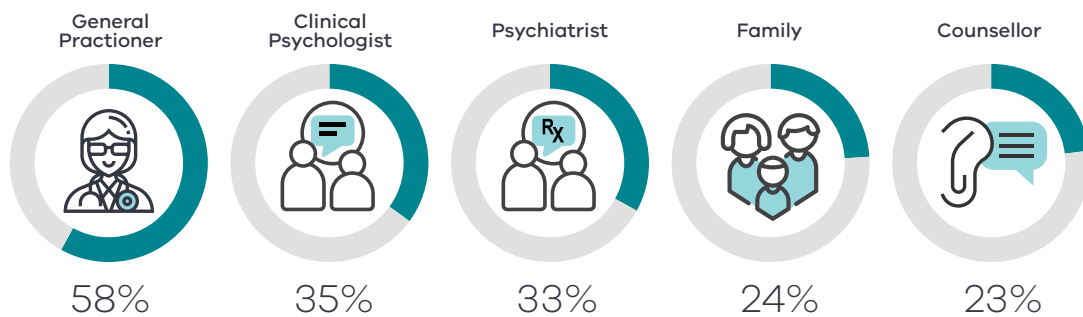
People were asked where they would go to get information about mental health if needed, either for themselves or someone close to them. Likely sources of information vary depending on age.

Figure 9: Likely sources of information, when experiencing mental health challenges

Roles and resources

People were asked whether they agree that government, communities and workplaces have a role to play in supporting people living with mental health challenges.

Most respondents agree that mental health is a community-wide and shared challenge.

The majority of respondents agree that government, communities and workplaces all have key roles to play in supporting people to experience their best mental health.

Figure 10: Agreement with statements about the role of government, community and workplaces and mental health

Government has a key role to play in supporting people to experience their best mental health

Governments have a key role in **educating the public** about mental health

Communities have a key role to play in supporting people to experience their best mental health

The **workplace** has a key role to play in supporting people to experience their best mental health
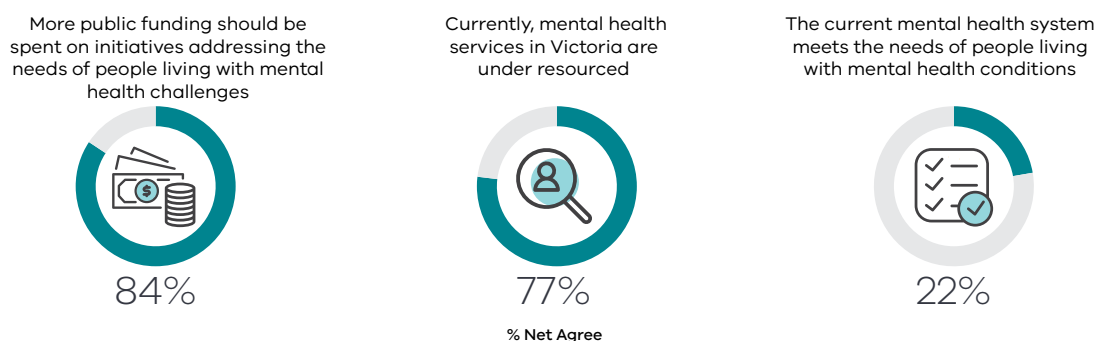
88% 86% 85% 84%

% Net Agree
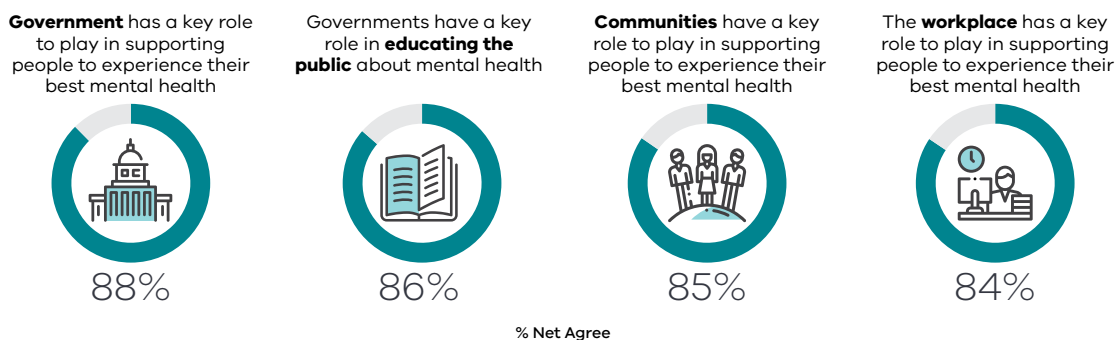
People were asked whether they agreed with statements about public funding, resources, and whether the system meets the needs of people living with mental health conditions.

Only around one in five respondents (22%) feel that the current mental health system meets the needs of people living with mental health challenges, and more than three quarters (77%) believe the system is under resourced.

People living in regional Victoria, and people who have experienced mental health challenges or know family or friends who have, are less likely to think the current mental health system meets the needs of people living with mental health challenges.

A large majority (84%) of respondents feel that more public funding should be spent on initiatives addressing the needs of people living with mental health challenges.

Figure 11: Perceptions of the adequacy and funding of Victoria's mental health system

More public funding should be spent on initiatives addressing the needs of people living with mental health challenges

Currently, mental health services in Victoria are under resourced

The current mental health system meets the needs of people living with mental health conditions

84% 77% 22%

% Net Agree