Handout 2: Mental Illness/Mental Health Problems

It is estimated that mental illness and mental health problems will affect one in five of the adult population in their lifetime. Mental illness affects all age, social and cultural groups.

Factors which increase the risk of developing mental health problems include low socio-economic status, unemployment, poor physical health and experiences of physical and sexual abuse. Equally, people with mental health problems and mental illness may face a higher risk of unemployment, poor physical health, and physical and sexual abuse.

Approximately 4% of people in Australia will experience severe mental disorders which significantly interfere with their mental wellbeing and reduce their capacity to participate fully in community life.

Many people who develop such a mental illness have only one episode, and if given appropriate care, are likely to recover completely. Of those who have more than one episode of an illness, most are able to be treated adequately and can lead productive lives. However, some individuals may become chronically disabled as a result of their illness, requiring ongoing assistance from family and/or mental health and other community support services.