



MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE USE

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) launches new awareness campaign on schizophrenia, highlighting it is a national shame that the average life expectancy of someone with schizophrenia is just 54 years old.

MIFA CEO, Tony Stevenson, says precious little has been done in terms of progress to help people with schizophrenia and highlights a million Australians are impacted in one way or another.

It is estimated that less than 50% of the people who have schizophrenia are even getting clinical or recovery assistance. MIFA says the help is out there and says the notion that people with schizophrenia have more than one personality is utter nonsense because they have one personality like everybody else.

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) has launched a new awareness campaign on schizophrenia highlighting that it is critical that people who are impacted get help as figures show almost 1 in every 23 Australians is now affected and schizophrenia impacts on one million Australians.

MIFA's CEO Tony Stevenson says there is no doubt that schizophrenia remains an illness the nation doesn't want to discuss – and says research now indicates less than 50% of the people who have schizophrenia are actually getting clinical or recovery assistance. He says it is vital people reach out because help *is* out there.

Tony Stevenson says people with schizophrenia – along with other serious mental illnesses – are **some of the most economically and socially marginalised people in Australia.**

He says an alarm bell should be rung about the fact that whilst there has been progress in a big way over depression, **there has been precious little progress forward with schizophrenia.**

Tony Stevenson said, "Right now 230,000 Australians have this illness. Three or four people close to them are then affected in major ways. The blunt reality is there is far too much stigma around schizophrenia. **It is a deeply stigmatised condition.** It isn't helped by some of the images people are presented with through media sometimes. Members of the public may feel people with schizophrenia are scary, hopeless and violent. That's just nonsense. It's inaccurate. Schizophrenia is largely treatable. Most people recover with a good quality of life."

MIFA is urging people to reach out. Anyone wanting help should dial 1800 985 944 or go to minetworks.org.au.

Tony Stevenson added, "Schizophrenia is a mental health condition that can be managed. We have research that indicates some people would rather have a terminal illness than schizophrenia. This is truly extraordinary."

"What we have to bear in mind is that it is a complex brain disorder which directly affects the normal functioning of a person's brain. It interferes with a person's ability to think, feel and act. Some recover altogether. Others may face a prolonged illness. Of course, there is a perpetual myth that people with schizophrenia have multiple personalities. That is just not true. They have one personality like everybody else."

"Our campaign highlights we have a big network of carers around the nation doing amazing work. These people are usually unpaid and we certainly want to salute these people in a big way."

The new MIFA awareness campaign urges people to be aware that schizophrenia is a common illness and recovery of a life in the community is possible. It is also urging politicians to release more funding for support and for research to help people living with persistent mental illnesses like schizophrenia.

Tony Stevenson added, "People with schizophrenia – on average – live 25 years less than the general population. It's very tough for this sector of the mental health community. It is an absolute disgrace that the average life expectancy of somebody with schizophrenia is just 54 years old. This needs to change. This is a chronic treatable illness not getting the attention it deserves. In a country as well resourced as Australia, it is quite ridiculous. We want everybody to talk more about mental health. It is how our country will get better."

"One of the reasons people die at such a young age is that people with schizophrenia often smoke. Whilst the national smoking rate sits at around 13%, with schizophrenia it is around 70%. It is obvious much more action is needed on this issue. Clearly we can reverse the trends. We have done it in a range of mental health areas. Schizophrenia is a big challenge."

"Let's dump the labels and see people for who they are. People with schizophrenia are people with a mental health illness. They are people and part of our community."

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SOME KEY POINTS AT A GLANCE

- Almost 1 in every 23 Australians is now affected by schizophrenia.
- It impacts on around one million Australians.
- It remains an illness the nation doesn't want to discuss.
- Less than 50% of the people with schizophrenia are getting clinical assistance.
- 230,000 Australians have the illness.
- It is a deeply stigmatised condition.
- It is nonsense to believe people with schizophrenia are scary, hopeless and violent.
- It is largely treatable.
- Most people recover with a good life.
- Schizophrenia can be managed.
- It is a complex brain disorder that directly affects the normal functioning of a person's brain.
- It is a myth to believe people with schizophrenia have multiple personalities – they have one just like everybody else.
- It's a national disgrace that the average life expectancy of someone with schizophrenia is just 54 years old.