

Embargoed and not for use prior to Tuesday October 10th, 2017

Latest Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) campaign designed to break apart the myths around Bipolar Disorder, highlighting people with Bipolar experience regular stigma from the general public (66%) and a staggering 42% experience it from health professionals.

MIFA CEO Tony Stevenson says there are so many myths that have to be broken apart and says sensationalist depictions in TV and films don't help. He says living with Bipolar isn't necessarily wonderful, creative or dangerous as depicted in movies. He says many people with Bipolar disorder can and do recover.

The latest Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) campaign is designed to break apart the huge number of myths around Bipolar disorder.

It is now estimated up to 1 in 50 people (2% of the population) has Bipolar disorder and most people experience their first symptoms by the age of 30.

Research has shown 66% of people with Bipolar experience regular stigma from the general public and a staggering 42% experience from their health professionals.

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia CEO Tony Stevenson says the campaign is designed to highlight:

- People with Bipolar disorder can and do recover....., that is, they recover a sense of their life in the community
- Stigma remains a huge issue for people living with the disorder – stigma from the public and health professionals.
- Early intervention is critical with properly funded support.
- Living with Bipolar is not necessarily wonderful or creative or dangerous as is often depicted in TV and movies.

Tony Stevenson said, "There are just so many myths. What we know is people with Bipolar disorder are often stigmatised as being dangerous, unpredictable or even 'two faced'. The reality is that with treatment and support many people with this disorder live in full recovery and may experience long periods in remission."

"Like all people living with mental illness in Australia, people with Bipolar disorder experience ostracism as well as significant levels of discrimination.

“Most public understanding about mental illness comes from sensationalized depictions in television or films. Community understanding about mental health disorders, in particular mood and anxiety disorders, has improved in recent times.”

“However there is no question there is still widespread misinformation, discrimination and stigmatisation around severe and/or psychotic mental illness. People with bipolar disorder are often misrepresented as having different identities or personalities, as opposed to having markedly different moods with an integrated identity.”

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia says there is also a misperception that the ‘highs’ or manic episodes experienced by people with bipolar disorder are thrilling and exciting. It points out that while manic episodes can be conducive to greater productivity and creativity, and people can experience psychotic symptoms such as delusions of grandeur, manic episodes can also be characterised by distressing symptoms such as agitation, insomnia and pressured speech.

MIFA says manic episodes can be equally as disruptive as depressive episodes, and the overall experience of episodes, whether manic or depressive, is often debilitating and frightening.

Tony Stevenson added, “People with mental illness need a system of supports to help them get through. This includes health professionals who treat them with respect, listen to their needs and meet them where they’re at - as well as other supports to help them get on their feet, learn from others who’ve had similar experience, and find pathways to community participation, housing, and employment.”

“In order for people with Bipolar disorder to get the help they need, Australia needs a mental health care system that is properly integrated between primary care providers, higher level clinical supports, and community supports. We also need to work to eradicate stigma and discrimination against people with a mental illness, because how can you get help if the person you are looking to for support is looking back at you without empathy?”

If you or someone you care about needs support, call MINetworks on 1800 985 944. MIFA also has support forums at <https://mifa.saneforums.org/> . If it's urgent, call Lifeline on 13 11 14, or emergency 000.

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