

Sign up, link in, get involved

Factsheet

This year's theme for Mental Health Week *"Building Resilience - Sign up, Link in, Get involved"* encourages participation in your community. There are many benefits to getting involved for your mental health and wellbeing. These include:

- improved self-esteem
- increased sense of belonging and connection to others
- reduced stress levels
- protection against mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

This fact sheet provides a number of simple, everyday ideas for how you can sign up, link in or get involved. Not every example will be something that you'd like to try, but there might be something that appeals to you. It could be something you've been thinking about trying for a while, or the ideas listed might inspire another idea just right for you.

Either way, use this opportunity to give an idea a go now, and notice how it affects your own wellbeing. You never know, you might even notice some changes straight away!

SIGN UP...

... for a course

Maintaining an interest in learning new things is considered one of the foundations of our wellbeing. Continuing our education throughout life can contribute to improved self-esteem, optimism, life satisfaction and provide opportunities for social interaction. Learning can be formal or informal.

- **Sign up for a course** to learn a new language, how to paint a landscape, how to use a computer or a variety of other skills. Community colleges are a good starting point in looking for a course that might interest you. To find a college near you go to www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au

- **Teach yourself a new skill.** Maybe you'd like to learn more cooking skills, how to fix a bicycle or design a website. Visit your local library and borrow a book or other resource. The library will have guides on a range of topics. Contact your local council to find the library closest to you or see www.sl.nsw.gov.au/services/public_libraries/docs/public-libraries-nsw.pdf

... for some physical activity

Undertaking physical activity on a regular basis is linked with enhanced physical and mental wellbeing. It is also associated with lower rates of some mental illnesses, as well as being an effective treatment addition for mild to moderate depression. Physical activity is also thought to be an excellent stress-busting tool and can be a great opportunity to connect with friends on a regular basis or to make new friends via group sports.

- **Find an activity that suits you.** This is important in sustaining any activity program. To get ideas on types of physical activities that might work well for you see www.abc.net.au/health/healthyliving/fitness/exerciseguide/



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- **Join a sporting club.** NSW Sport and Recreation has a great list of representative sporting bodies for sport and recreation activities across the state. Contact the relevant organisation to find a club near you. See www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/sportsclubs/contacts.asp

- **Combine catching up with friends with physical activity.** Exercise together by going for a walk, run or a bike ride and grab that cup of coffee afterwards.

LINK IN...

... with local services

We can't always tackle problems alone. Getting help when it's needed and tapping into external supportive networks is an important ingredient for building resilience. Seeking help early can prevent an issue from getting worse and help you bounce back to your life more quickly. If you are already receiving support, you might find it useful to connect with other networks in your area, such as self help or support groups.

- If you think you might be struggling with a mental health problem **it's important to seek help.** Your GP would be a good first step.

- If you have a mental health problem, you may like to join a **support group.**

- For information and referral to services in your local area call the Mental Health Information Service on 1300 794 991 or www.mentalhealth.asn.au

- For information and referral on mental health services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds contact the Transcultural Mental

Health Centre's Clinical Consultation and Assessment Service on 1800 648 911.

... with family and friends

Looking after our relationships with family and friends is one of the most important things we can do to develop our resilience. Relationships contribute to our self esteem, self confidence and sense of purpose and meaning in life. Many individuals place a great emphasis on the extended family as a source of support and this may serve as a significant protective factor for our mental wellbeing. Building strong relationships with family and friends enriches and enlivens us.

- **Take time to nurture your close relationships.** By making them a priority you'll be a source of support for each other during both the good and tough times. Schedule in regular times to catch up on the phone, for coffee, or to have fun together.

- **Expand your social networks.** Get involved in activities that will provide opportunities to meet new people. Take a dance class, join a book club or volunteer for a cause you believe in. Building new connections can be difficult at first, but making that initial effort will bring rewards. Break the ice by talking about the issue, activity or cause you are both involved in.

- **Reach out to someone you know is isolated.** Sometimes circumstances can make it difficult for some people to connect, for example, your elderly neighbour or your colleague in a satellite office. By reaching out, you will enrich their life and you may be surprised by the positive effects it will have on you too.



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GET INVOLVED ...

... in volunteering

Volunteering is an excellent way to get more involved with and help out your local community, and it is beneficial to you at the same time. Volunteering increases social connectedness, quality of life and wellbeing. This is especially true for older people.

- **Find a cause you are passionate about.** The Centre for Volunteering and Volunteering NSW provide information about volunteering and can help you find a role that matches your interests and skills www.volunteering.com.au
- **Practice random acts of kindness.** New research into happiness has shown that performing one act of kindness a week for six weeks can significantly improve your wellbeing. Small, regular acts of kindness have been shown to benefit physical health too. It might be things paying a compliment to a stranger or making a cup of coffee for a colleague. For simple ideas see www.actsofkindness.org

... in community groups

Getting involved in community groups can incorporate many of the beneficial activities described above: building connections with other people, learning new things, and volunteering your time. From sporting teams and faith-based groups to rotary clubs and activism organisations, there are many options for broadening your horizons.

- One of the more recent and popular groups to be created are **Men's Sheds** which provide a workshop space for groups of mostly men to gather, work and interact. Research has shown that the groups provide a sense of belonging to participants and other positive wellbeing outcomes. To find out if there is a Men's Shed near you see www.mensheds.com.au or www.mensshed.org.

- **Start your own special interest group.** Perhaps you know a few other people who are also interested in similar things to you such as craft, photography, card games, wine appreciation, or bushwalking. Set aside some time each month to explore your passion together. Check out the website www.getalife.com.au to link up with other like-minded people.
- A growing number of studies suggest that being able to express ones culture through art, cultural pride and creativity has positive mental health benefits. Look out for creative and cultural organisations to get involved with to help you express yourself.

What if I'm already participating?

If you're already leading an active, connected life that's great! If you are thinking of getting involved in even more activities, remember that its important for your mental health not to take on too many commitments and overburden yourself.

But there might be ways you could tend to the wellbeing of others by making it easy for them to get more involved. Take some time to think about how you could make your networks more inclusive and reach out to other community members who could benefit.



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For example, make sure your community group or social network is, welcoming and friendly to new people and open to others who might experience some barriers to participation. This includes people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, or people living with disabilities including mental illnesses.

Building community understanding and acceptance of diverse communities as well as enhancing social connections contributes to broader social harmony.

Where next?

Websites

Community colleges - www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au

Public Libraries - www.sl.nsw.gov.au/services/public_libraries/docs/public-libraries-nsw.pdf

Sporting bodies - www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/sportsclubs/contacts.asp

Volunteering opportunities - www.volunteering.com.au

Men's Sheds - www.mensheds.com.au

The Changing Minds - www.changingminds.org.au.

Contact these people/organisations:

Mental Health Information Service - 1300 794 991 or www.mentalhealth.asn.au for services in your area

Transcultural Mental Health Centre - information and referral on mental health issues: 1800 648 911 www.dhi.gov.au/tmhc

To obtain this fact sheet and other resources in different languages (Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Khmer, Korean, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese) please contact the Transcultural Mental Health Centre on 1800 648 911 or visit the website at www.dhi.gov.au/tmhc

Sources

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Milner, J 2003 Arts in Community: Arts & culture in the community, part 2. Alliance for Arts and Culture, Vancouver, Canada.

Mental Health Information Service - information and referral on mental health issues: 1300 794 991 www.mentalhealth.asn.au

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