

Australia scores poor report card on mental health:

Results from 'Australia's Biggest Mental Health Check-in'

Conventional approaches to managing mental health are expensive, time-consuming and inaccurate, according to the nation's largest, proactive mental health check¹ report card set for release today (August 8, 2017).

'Australia's Biggest Mental Health Check-in' – an innovative digital public health initiative designed to measure, educate and drive change in the mental health arena – engaged more than 3,100 Australian participants aged between 18-89 over the course of two, four week-long campaigns.¹ Participants completed an online, subjective measurement of their mental health, and utilised world-first Medibio wearable technology to obtain an objective dashboard score of their mental wellness.¹ The results revealed 39 per cent of participants were living with depression, while another 37 per cent met the criteria for anxiety disorders.¹ Most alarmingly however, nine-in-10 participants exhibiting symptoms of a severe mental health illness, were neither undergoing, nor yet to receive, treatment.¹

Generation Z (participants aged 18-24) recorded the highest incidence of depression, anxiety and sleep disturbance, and shared the lowest scores of all age categories on trust.¹ Generation Y (25-34 year olds) were the next age group most likely to be living with a mental health illness, while Generation X (those aged 45-54) were the least likely.¹

Self-criticism, perfectionism and low self-awareness also emerged as key behavioural influencers of the nation's mental health.¹ The findings identified significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety¹ compared with the latest national Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures (6.1 per cent and 14.2 per cent, respectively),² and contrary to universal literature reporting a stronger female prevalence,³ revealed minimal difference in the prevalence of depression among males (49 per cent) versus females (51 per cent).¹ Participants were significantly more likely to experience depression if reporting high levels of perfectionism, poor sleep, low trust, and social withdrawal as a stress coping mechanism.

According to psychologist, founder of Vital Conversations and creator of *Australia's Biggest Mental Health Check-in*, Peta Slocombe, Perth, despite growing public awareness of, and financial investment in mental health, its incidence is escalating.

"Life is evidently much harder for many Australian adults than what it should be. Of all the problems in the world that are unsolvable, mental health is not one of them.

"Our sobering *Check-in* outcomes aggressively challenge the deployment of traditional approaches in the optimal management and treatment of mental health, such as one-on-one psychological support, GP visits and medication, given their questionable effectiveness, accuracy, and associated time and costs," said Ms Slocombe.

"Our results reveal high variability in the traditional identification and management of people living with mental illnesses, and mount a strong argument for change, if we are to turn the tide on what has become the planet's single biggest disease."⁴

According to Ms Slocombe, mental health remains heavily stigmatised, and is most commonly addressed only when issues become unavoidable.

"People don't perceive mental health in the same light as they do a physical illness. Mental illness is a gradual thing – it comes on slowly.

"Our *Check-in* was designed to make it cheaper, faster and more efficient for people to undertake a mental health check, and to arm participants with appropriate and accurate mental health-related information, and support," Ms Slocombe said.

Check-in participant, veterinarian and co-owner of five vet clinics, Paul Davey, 46, Perth, has dedicated the past 20 years to improving veterinarian mental health. He ran a graduate mentoring scheme for the Australian Veterinarian Association (AVA) between 1998 and 2013 that tackled the extraordinarily high suicide rates among the veterinarian community (four-times higher than the national average). Throughout his career, Mr Davey has witnessed many of his friends and colleagues succumb to, or be affected by, suicide and other mental health illnesses. Since 1996, he has devoted countless hours to teaching veterinarian graduates how to juggle increasing time pressures and client expectations, while proactive identification and management of the early signs of mental illness.

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Mr Davey has benefited significantly from the objective digital dashboard of mental health resources and results provided by the *Check-in*, citing “I’m now making a concerted effort to exercise more, use a mindfulness app, and adjust my work schedule to better accommodate for family time.”

With support from Vital Conversations, Mr Davey has introduced the *Check-in* to more than 200 vets and 20 members of his staff.

“I encouraged my colleagues and staff to consider the *Check-in* as they would a regular GP check-up – to take a proactive approach toward their mental health and wellbeing.

“The feedback I’ve received from my colleagues regarding the *Check-in* has been overwhelmingly positive. The *Check-in* has reaffirmed their suspicions regarding their mental health status, and offered them a clear way forward,” said Mr Davey.

Ms Slocombe emphasised the use of technology to generate a subjective and objective dashboard of mental health assessment, arms the individual and healthcare providers alike, with invaluable insights.

“By arming people with accurate information, and appropriate treatment and support, they can effectively and efficiently get their lives back on track,” Ms Slocombe said.

In summary, the *Check-in* reinforced the need for earlier intervention in mental health, measuring objective and subjective markers in diagnosis, and more accessible screening programs, to help reduce the nation’s incidence of mental illness.

Our nation’s mental health & wellbeing

One-in-five Australians experience a mental health condition in any given year, and almost one-in-two will develop a mental health condition at some stage during their lives.² This equates to an estimated 45 per cent of Australians experiencing a mental health illness during their lifetime.² Three million Australians are currently living with depression or anxiety.² Depression poses a direct treatment cost of AUD \$12.6 billion each year.⁵

About Australia’s Biggest Mental Health Check-in

Australia’s Biggest Mental Health Check-in represents the nation’s largest, proactive, digital public health initiative designed to measure, educate and drive change in the nation’s mental health.¹ Launched in October 2016, followed by a second phase in May 2017, the *Check-in* combined a 12 minute online, subjective survey with a ‘Medibio-ID’ screening – the world’s-first objective test for the diagnosis of depression, chronic stress and other mental health illnesses.¹ The *Check-in* attracted more than 4,400 personal or workplace-subsidised registrations over eight weeks – 3,102 participants completed the *Check-in*, predominantly through their workplace.¹ Participants received a 16 page dashboard and customised mental health program direct to their device, outlining the outcomes of their mental health, risk factors and protective factors, and an individual score in accordance with population norms.¹

Check-in participants represented WA (1,245), NSW (767), VIC (444), QLD (287), SA (152), NT (69), TAS (11), ACT (10) and NZ (117). *Check-in* corporate participants – progressive, proactive and early adopters of mental health programs – included, but were not limited to, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Wesfarmers, Broadspectrum, CBH, St John of God Health Care, HBF, Australian Veterinarian Association, Centurion Group, Water Corporation, Brightwater Care Group and Presbyterian Ladies College.

About Vital Conversations

Vital Conversations is a psychology, coaching, organisational development, training, profiling and leadership provider to individuals, teams and whole systems within the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. They use digital technology to offer innovative solutions to significant mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety and stress, to help people change.

About Medibio

Medibio is an Australian headquartered, evidence-based medical technology company that has developed an objective test to assist in the diagnosis and management of depression, chronic stress and other mental health illnesses. Based on research conducted over 15 years at the University of Western Australia, their test utilises a panel of patented (and patent pending) circadian, sleep and autonomic system biomarkers to objectively quantify and characterise mental illness.

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DIGITAL MEDIA KIT: Available for download today – TUES, AUG 8, 2017 at <http://vitalconvos.blogspot.com.au/>
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