

MEDIA RELEASE

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Research reveals older Australians' mental health hit hard by pandemic

COTA calls for National Older Persons Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The mental health of older Australians was hit hard during the Covid-19 pandemic, with one in seven people aged over 75 saying their mental health worsened during pandemic period, research released today by the Council on the Ageing – the peak body for older Australians – has revealed.

The research report *'Mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The lived experience of Australians aged 75 and over'* surveyed over 1000 Australians aged 75+ about the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on their mental health.

Key findings included:

- Older women were more likely than older men to report their mental health worsened during the Pandemic, fluctuated regularly, or they experienced mental ill health for the first time.
- 14 per cent of respondents reported their mental health worsened during the pandemic period.
- 15 per cent said their mental health fluctuated regularly.
- Loneliness and distress arising from social isolation and separation from friends and family were identified as the key impacts.
- Even those who considered themselves unaffected by the pandemic described themselves as living with 'worry' and 'stress,' of experiencing sadness, loss, lack of sleep and appetite, of distress.
- 20% of those who reported their mental health suffered said they had no one to talk to during periods of lockdowns.
- 8% of those who reported their mental health suffered said they couldn't get the help they needed.

The latest progress report (2020) on the National Mental and Suicide Prevention Plan 2017-2022 highlighted that current indicators did not demonstrate improved mental health outcomes for older people.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia Sparrow said today's report's findings back up the Government's own progress report and highlighted the urgent need to fund and measure older persons mental health and wellbeing supports.

"The mental health needs of older Australians are so often forgotten about," Ms Sparrow said.

"Throughout the pandemic we heard a lot about the mental health needs of other age groups, but too often we seem to forget that older Australians need our support too.

"This research shows that older Australians were doing it incredibly tough throughout the pandemic and without adequate data and targeted strategies to help them, there's no way of knowing if that's getting any better or worse.

"We know how crucial and effective proactive, early intervention strategies can be when we're looking at mental health, but there are very few proactive put in place to support older Australians and that needs to change. We need to ensure that the strategies older people asked for – support for strong social connections, the right information, access to social support and services, age-informed mental health expertise – are in place and funded as part of the 6th National Mental Health Plan.

"All Australians, no matter what their age, should have the right to an adequate standard of healthcare, and this includes mental health care and services."

Media contact: Tamara Kotoyan, 0430 291 890 or Alana mew, 0419 929 722