

**MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA
LAUNCH OF NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH MONTH 2022
IN TASMANIA**

ADDRESS BY

**HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**

HOBART FUNCTION AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, 1 OCTOBER 2022

I welcome you all to this very important event to launch National Mental Health Month 2022 in Tasmania.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their continued connection to land, sea, and culture. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

I also acknowledge:

- The Honourable Elise Archer MP
- Ms Anita Dow MP
- Lord Mayor of Hobart, Councillor Anna Reynolds
- Mr Daryl Williams, MHFA Director
- Mr Vasan Srinivasan, MHFA CEO

Annual mental health awareness campaigns began in states from around 1950. This current format of setting aside October as National Mental Health Month, an initiative of the Mental Health Foundation Australia, started as a week in 2010. This was increased to a month-long event due to the overwhelming increase in organisations participating.

This year, the awareness campaign theme is: *'Building Resilience: Communities and Connections'*.¹

¹ <https://www.mhfa.org.au/cms/national-mental-health-month-2022> accessed 28 Sept 22

Community resilience is certainly needed, and will continue to be needed, due to the large number of people across our Nation who suffer some form of mental illness.

The statistics regarding mental health in Australia are sobering. An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study of mental health and wellbeing in 2021 found that an estimated 21% of Australians aged between 16 and 85 had experienced some form of mental disorder in the previous 12 months. This study also found that some 44% in that age range had experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime. In addition, more than half a million children aged 4 to 17 had experienced a mental disorder in the 12 months prior to the survey.

We are all very aware of the health, social and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The potential for its impact on mental health and wellbeing was recognised early in 2020 as the stresses of movement restrictions, social distancing and physical isolation took an enormous toll. Even members of the community who did not previously suffer a mental illness were impacted.

We know, as well, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffer a much greater burden of mental health when compared with non-Indigenous Australians.²

Those statistics are mirrored in Tasmania, where a higher proportion of the population are living with long-term mental health conditions, compared to the national statistics. About 8.8% of Australians reported in the 2021 Census that they had a long-term condition. In Tasmania, that figure was 11.5%³.

National Mental Health Month is therefore a significant initiative to raise awareness of the prevalence of mental health disorders, but also to educate the community about the treatments and support available.

In 2021, it was reported that the reach of National Mental Health Month was significant, with a high degree of influence in the community. Cooperation and strategic communications between government groups and organisations

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health> accessed 28 Sept 22

³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/6> accessed 28 Sept 22

resulted in community contact with more than 10 million Australians. That number included more than 3,000 ethnic community groups with a combined membership near 800,000.

I note that the mission of the Mental Health Foundation Australia is to be the leading provider of inclusive advocacy, awareness, education, support, research and resilience to promote mental health for all. Based on these results from National Mental Health Month 2021, it appears that the mission is being achieved.

During my time as a judge, I saw evidence of the toll on families and communities of the issues associated with mental illnesses. Personally, I am aware of the effect of mental illness on sufferers and their families, having experienced my mother battle depression throughout her life.

I fully support and commend the work of the Mental Health Foundation Australia. I thank you all for your work to raise awareness and support mental health initiatives. Thank you for being here to launch National Mental Health Month for 2022 in Tasmania. I wish you all the best for the series of events planned during this month.