

Mental health nurses in-demand in 2021: shortage projected

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Mental health nursing is an in-demand profession and is listed in the top three nursing disciplines that are likely to see a significant shortage in practitioners in 2021.

"Mental health nurses play an important role in both the public and private sector and the strain that external environmental factors have placed on Australians in the past 18 months has skyrocketed the need for quality nurses who want to specialise in mental health," said ACMHN President, Dr Mike Hazelton.

Along with aged care nursing and critical care nursing, mental health nursing has been highlighted as one of the three fields that will see a significant shortfall between people in need of care, and availability of qualified nurses, and it is not hard to see why.

According to projections published by Health Workforce Australia, mental health nursing is the one that is likeliest to suffer from the most dramatic worker shortages in the future.

"Mental health is a national health and research priority and as such, this is a growth area for healthcare workers," said Charles Darwin University Associate Professor Mel Underwood

"As the national representative body for mental health nurses, not only is it a research priority for us but it is an on-the-ground priority," continued Dr Hazelton.

Apart from the obvious challenges, there are a number of tangible reasons why mental health nursing services are being sought more than ever before:

1. **Vulnerable people:** for people who were already vulnerable and seeking treatment for their mental health prior to the bushfires, COVID-19 and other weather events such as drought and flooding, 2020 may have pushed people into a state of requiring more specialised treatment.
2. **Heightened everyday need:** for people who felt like they had the tools in their toolbox to monitor and manage their mental health, 2020 may have created an environment where they exhausted all the normal or known resources that they had previously used as effective coping mechanisms in stressful situations. They also may have faced challenges outside of normal everyday life, such as the loss of a loved one or extreme financial hardship. For many people, 2020 may have been the first time that they sought treatment for their mental health.
3. **Mental health awareness:** the reduction of stigma around mental health has made Australians more self-aware when it comes to their own mental health.

Mental health nursing is a unique interpersonal process, which promotes and maintains behaviours that contribute to integrated functioning for individuals and communities.

"Our profession is part of what has been labelled the 'care economy' in a post-COVID-19 world and whilst all healthcare professionals are very important, mental health nursing is a vital lifeline with a personalised approach, Dr Hazelton continued."

"Mental health nursing would suit someone who really wants to make a difference and work with some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Mental health nursing can be very rewarding and embodies the concept of caring by supporting clients who are unable to maintain mental, social or physical health functions for themselves. We work on the basis of empowering our clients to take an active role in self-advocacy and self-care," Dr Hazelton concluded.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australians engaged in 7.2 million mental health related services in the six months to September 2020.

To support this demand and to start a conversation with those at the beginning of their study journey or nurses who may be looking to specialise in mental health, we invite you to learn more about the mental health nursing profession via the ACMHN website, with links to specific training information.

Learn more at www.acmhn.org.

For further comment, please contact ACMHN President, Dr Mike Hazelton on 0448 121 012 or at president@acmhn.org.

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is the pre-eminent and authoritative voice of the mental health nursing profession in Australia. It provides leadership to, and advocacy for mental health issues across the mental health sector and nursing, as well as setting national standards of practice in mental health nursing.