

About the Australian Guidelines for PTSD

Australia's first treatment guidelines for acute stress disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder (ASD and PTSD) are now available. These new Guidelines will assist health practitioners to determine:

- When is the right time for different interventions?
- What is the best approach for helping people affected by trauma?

Approved by the National Health and Medical Research Council, these new Guidelines provide practical recommendations applicable in all healthcare settings. The Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) developed the Guidelines in consultation with trauma experts from a range of disciplines, as well as people affected by trauma.

Key information

- The experience of a traumatic event is common. 65 per cent of Australians are likely to experience a traumatic event some time in their lives such as:
 - an accident
 - sexual assault
 - violence
 - a natural disaster, like bushfires, cyclones and floods
 - war; or
 - torture
- Most people will recover with the support of family and friends but some people will need professional help before they can get on with their lives.
- Following a traumatic event, people should be offered practical support, information and encouragement to actively seek the support of family and friends. Only those who go on to develop psychological problems such as ASD or PTSD should be offered specialist treatment.
- A person with ASD or PTSD has three main types of problems:
 - Re-living the traumatic event
 - Being overly alert or wound-up
 - Avoiding reminders of the event

- It is not unusual for people with PTSD to have other mental health problems at the same time. The most common problems include depression, anxiety and drug and alcohol abuse.
- Effective treatment for ASD and PTSD involves confronting the memory of the traumatic event and beliefs associated with it. Medication may not be the first choice of treatment but can be useful in many cases.
- It's never too late to start addressing PTSD. A delay to treatment should not affect its success.

Getting help

Doctors are a good first point of call and can help people determine if there is a problem and what the best approach might be. Mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers can also help decide on the most appropriate care.

Treatment works

The Guidelines include comprehensive recommendations, but a few simple principles underpin the delivery of evidence-based care:

- Initial assistance involves practical and emotional support tailored to individual needs
- People should be encouraged to return to their usual social and work routines
- Mental health interventions should only be offered where a person is not recovering
- Trauma-focussed psychological interventions are strongly supported by research
- Some people will need both psychological help and medication
- It's never too late to start dealing with the psychological aftermath of trauma

Who are the Guidelines for?

- Health practitioners supporting people affected by trauma or treating those who have gone on to develop mental health problems as a result.
- Organisations funding programs which help survivors of natural disasters, accidents, sexual assault, crime or torture; emergency workers; veterans and the military.
- People experiencing ASD or PTSD, and their families making decisions about their care.

How do you get a copy?

There are four versions of the Guidelines to suit different needs.

1. The full Guidelines, a reference version, includes a systematic review of the literature
2. A brief practitioner guide for easy use
3. A summary of the key treatment recommendations for practitioners
4. A guide to treatment for people diagnosed with ASD or PTSD, their families and carers

Visit www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au to download copies.

Guidelines Development Group

ACPMH developed the Guidelines in consultation with trauma experts from a range of disciplines, as well as people affected by trauma. The Guidelines Development Group comprised a Steering Committee, Working Party and Multidisciplinary Panel. Members are listed below.

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