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Doorknocking to understand nation's mental health



A recent government-funded study found 46 per cent of people would accept a face to face conversation if a mental health expert knocked on their door.

EXCLUSIVE

By **STEPHEN LUNN**

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If someone came to your front door and asked if they could talk to you about your mental health, would you invite them in for a cuppa?

A recent government-funded project did just that, doorknocking around 37,500 homes across the country. They found a surprisingly high proportion, 46 per cent, were prepared to have the face-to-face conversation, and the information gathered was disturbing.

Run by Community Mental Health Australia, the project found nearly half of those

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needed more support than they were receiving.

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Of those who said they wanted to seek help with their mental health, 43 per cent said they weren't able to, for reasons including cost, not knowing where to go to get support, or being too afraid, embarrassed or ashamed to ask.

Precarious housing, employment challenges and financial stress also correlated with higher levels of distress, the study showed.

Importantly, according to an evaluation of the project by the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia, the conversations sparked action.

Six in ten said they felt encouraged to speak to a loved one about their own mental health and wellbeing, the evaluation found.

And more than half took some further action or set a plan to seek professional help, with 32 per cent contacting a professional, a service or a community organisation to ask about support for their mental health or wellbeing.

"People welcomed the chance to open up and discuss their support needs with a stranger knocking at their front door, often expressing their struggles while also not being aware of all the support options," Centre for Social impact researcher Lisette Kaleveld said.

"Prohibitive costs, shame, the preference to self-manage and not knowing what supports are available were the most common barriers to people accessing support.

"It is clearly an uphill battle for too many people to access the support they need, especially if they are already in distress or juggling various crises such as financial or housing stress at the same time," Dr Kaleveld said.

Community Mental Health Australia chief executive officer Bill Gye said the research showed the connection between the mental health crisis and other societal issues, but they were too often treated separately in public policy discussions.

"Most people think of greater health expenditure as the policy response to the mental health crisis, but we need to be thinking more broadly about the underlying causes which drive mental distress like social inequality, poverty, lack of affordable housing and poor lifestyle," Mr Gye said.

The project included input from communities in each state and territory, including Cabramatta, Toowoomba, Ipswich, Port Adelaide, Burnie, Fitzroy and Bendigo.

STEPHEN LUNN, SOCIAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

Stephen Lunn is The Australian's Social Affairs Editor, covering social policy issues including ageing, disability, welfare, immigration and population policy. He



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COMMENTS

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PLATO27 1 DAY AGO

I would tell you to mind your own business myself.

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Wendy 1 DAY AGO

Didn't the ALP reduce Mental Health Visit's by half in the October Budget?

So they cut funding that really helped people and replaced it with a survey about Mental Health paid for by Taxpayers that no one asked for and has no tangible benefits.

ALP just continually keep wasting Taxpayers money.

Very sad when so many people are struggling mentally and financially because of this government's inaction, who keep pushing their own agenda at everyone else's expense.

Interesting to see how much further in debt we will be in by 2025.

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Rebecca 1 DAY AGO

What were the specific questions or, more specifically, were there only certain parameters within which the mental health issues were discussed; for example, did the options for the causes of distress include the radical measures being prosecuted by the current federal government?

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Rob45 1 DAY AGO

An other piece of "Do kids like icecream?" research to obtain more tax payers' money for a pet project.

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M 1 DAY AGO

I would be interested in those who answered the door but said no.

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Richard 1 DAY AGO

How much funding did Community Mental Health Australia get from the Feds for this vox pop exercise. A survey with no credibility.

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Jason 1 DAY AGO

Who is paying for all this?

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Three guesses: 1) the taxpayers 2) the taxpayers & 3) the taxpayers!

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Kristin 2 DAYS AGO

Hardly surprising when the government is predicting climate catastrophe, world war 3 and economic doom.

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Rebecca 1 DAY AGO

And pushing in a very muscular and biased way, a racist referendum which will forever change our country and its sovereignty; a real pandora's box if ever there was one! That causes me a great deal of mental stress, as well as Bowen and his extreme climate change initiatives while he shows off in front of the world and on the world stage!

Report Like 2 Reply

Roxgo 2 DAYS AGO

No interviewer has ever knocked on my door to check how I was. In all of my 80 odd years have I never been interviewed for even one of these surveys. Makes you wonder if they are just 'pie in the sky' data collections from city centres only.

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