



## A whole of organisation commitment to increasing the physical health of MHACA participants.

**The Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) became a signatory to the Equally Well Consensus Statement in 2020.**

Equally Well is a program of the National Mental Health Commission and has become a priority action of The Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. The Consensus Statement asks organisations across Australia to pledge to take action to support the physical health of people with mental health conditions.

It is well documented that people who have a severe and complex mental health illness have a reduced life expectancy of about 10-20 years compared to the general population.

Four out of every five people living with mental illness have a co-existing physical illness.

Compared to the general population, people living with mental illness are:

- Two times more likely to have cardiovascular disease
- Two times more likely to have respiratory disease
- Two times more likely to have metabolic syndrome
- Two times more likely to have diabetes
- Two times more likely to have osteoporosis
- 65% more likely to smoke
- Six times more likely to have dental problems, and
- Comprise around one third of all avoidable deaths

People living with mental illness experience much poorer physical health than others for a range of reasons including side effects of medications, silos between physical and mental health services, stigma and discrimination, and 'diagnostic overshadowing'.

Key contributing factors include:

- late diagnosis and intervention
- difficulty discerning emerging illness
- higher rates of obesity, smoking and sedentary activity
- low rates of health screening
- not having a GP

Find more information at [www.equallywell.org.au](http://www.equallywell.org.au)



*MHACA participants and staff at the Pool Fun With Lucinda health promotion activity December 2020*

**The Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds Strategy** builds on the existing work of MHACA in supporting the physical health of our participants and strengthens MHACA's approach into a whole of organisation commitment.

[www.mhaca.org.au](http://www.mhaca.org.au)  
[info@mhaca.org.au](mailto:info@mhaca.org.au)  
 08 89504600



**MHACA**  
 Mental Health  
 Association of  
 Central Australia

# Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds Strategy

The strategy identifies 5 key action areas:

## Introduction of a Health Prompt

Neami National has developed and trialled Australia's first physical health needs identification tool designed specifically for a community mental health setting. The Health Prompt is simple to use and available to other organisations to improve health responses and outcomes for people with complex needs. MHACA will tailor the Health Prompt to a Central Australian setting, using a co-design process with our participants.

### Actions:

- Tailor NEAMI Health Prompt for MHACA participants
- Staff training on Health Prompt implementation
- Participants are offered the opportunity to complete the Health Prompt every 6 months

## Development of a MHACA Healthy Eating Policy

The public dietitians from the Central Australian Health Service (CAHS) have been leading a community process around examining food security and organisational responsibilities to provide healthy food for consumers. A Healthy Eating Policy will provide guidelines around what food MHACA will provide to participants and what food is appropriate for distribution at public events.

### Actions:

- Adapt CAHS Nutrition Policy to create a MHACA Healthy Eating Policy
- Staff education on healthy food swaps and nutrition
- Participant education on healthy cooking and eating including special events like Smart Eating Week

## Educational Campaign on Smoking Reduction and Cessation

Smoking is a key risk factor for premature death for people with mental health conditions.

Diseases caused by smoking are second biggest reason for death for people with mental illness. Early intervention, education and programs can support people to reduce or quit smoking.

### Actions:

- Review MHACA Smoking Policy and implement any changes with staff and participants
- Staff training to support participant conversations and referrals
- Participant education on smoking cessation and targeted health promotion events

## Ongoing Exercise Activities as Part of the Group Activities Calendar

Sedentary lifestyles increase all causes of mortality, double the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and obesity, and increase the risks of colon cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, lipid disorders, depression and anxiety. Exercise can improve mood and reduce symptoms of mental illness, including depression and anxiety. Exercise can also improve sleep quality, increase energy levels and reduce stress.

### Actions:

- Exercise activities to continue to be included on the monthly group activities calendar
- Participant education on the benefits of exercise including special health promotion events

## Educational Campaign on Oral Health

Regular dental checks and a good oral hygiene routine is vital to wellbeing and good mental health. Research has shown that those suffering from mental illnesses tend to avoid dental services. A healthy, pain-free mouth leads to a better state of mind as well as lowering the risk of other diseases.

### Actions:

- Participant education on oral health including special health promotion events

Find more information on the NEAMI National Health Prompt at [www.neaminational.org.au](http://www.neaminational.org.au)