

Government-subsidised mental health services are underused in Australian residential aged care facilities

Cations M et al. (2022) *Australian Health Review* doi:10.1071/AH22049



Purpose of the study

To understand how people living in residential aged care facilities use Medicare-funded mental health services.

Method

Using data from the Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA), a retrospective cohort study between 2012 and 2017 was conducted.



Key findings

- Examination of 318,484 Australian aged care residents found that use of Medicare subsidised mental health services was very low overall.
- Less than 3% of aged care residents with a mental health condition accessed funding subsidies for services provided by GPs, psychiatrists and allied health.
- People living in residential care were three-times less likely to access these services than the general population.
- People with dementia were least likely to access non-pharmacological mental health services.
- While presence of mental health conditions is increasing in residential aged care, the use of mental health services remains low.



Why does this problem occur?

- Staff in residential aged care have limited training and resources to identify the mental health needs of residents.
- There are not enough mental health professionals working in residential aged care.
- People living in residential care have been ineligible for some services that are available to the rest of the Australian population, despite having high needs.

What does this study do?

- Highlights the need for organisational and policy changes to improve access to publicly funded mental health care for people living in residential aged care.
- There is an imperative to prioritise, upskill and embed a mental health workforce into residential aged care.

2012

2017