



# Psychotic Illness

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities it is important to acknowledge our shared historical and continued deep connections to our land, our community, our ancestors, and our culture. When yarning about mental health, these connections can shape how we understand, experience, and respond to mental health conditions that have psychotic illnesses.

This fact sheet aims to provide a basic understanding of psychotic illnesses, recognising what it looks and feels like, and offering coping strategies within our different cultural contexts.

## What is “Psychotic Illness”?

Psychotic illnesses are mental health disorders with distortions in thinking, what we see, how we feel, how we speak, how we feel about ourselves, and how we act. Common psychotic disorders include schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, and certain forms of bipolar disorder. These illnesses can make it hard to lose touch with reality and can make daily life hard and hurt their wellbeing. They often happen in late teens or early adulthood, and while they can be hard, with appropriate support and treatment, recovery is possible. People can also fall into psychosis when on drugs and alcohol, either when they are on it or trying to get off drugs and alcohol. This is called drug induced psychosis.

## WHAT DOES PSYCHOTIC ILLNESS LOOK LIKE?

Knowing how psychotic illnesses look and feel can be an important first step in managing them.

Some common signs include:

- **Hallucinations:** Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that aren't there.
- **Delusions:** Holding strong beliefs that are not in line with normal culture and still believing them when there is proof against it.
- **Thought Disorder:** Difficulty putting thoughts together or connecting them logically.
- **Negative Symptoms:** Loss of motivation, not hanging out with people, not being able to feel emotions as well, and not taking care of your body.

## Strategies for Managing Psychotic Illness

- **Seeking Professional Help:** Psychotic illnesses requires a psychiatrist appointment to discuss the recommended Mental Health treatment plan, which may include medication, therapy, and community service supports.

For support in making a psychiatrist appointment talk to your doctor at your local Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), health service, or hospital.

- **Creating a Supportive Network:** Having a group of people, or carers who understand the illness can help manage symptoms and strengthen your spirit.
- **Engaging with Culture and Community:** Connecting with culture, practices, and community can provide a sense of belonging and support.
- **Self-Care:** Eating good food, exercising regularly, getting 8 hours at least of sleep, reducing your drug use and drinking less can all make you feel better.



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## PROTECTIVE FACTORS WITHIN OUR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Our culture and community offer unique protective factors that can help guard against and manage mental health conditions such as psychotic illnesses:



***Cultural Identity and Practices:*** Embracing our culture and engaging in cultural practices can make us feel a deep sense of belonging and community.



***Connection to Country:*** Our connection to country is important and powerful. Spending time on the land or water can restore our sense of balance from our connection to culture through country.



***Community Involvement:*** helping out with community events, ceremonies, and gatherings can strengthen social connections and shared understanding of culture.



***Support from Elders:*** Elders hold a lot of wisdom, guidance, and understanding. They can provide cultural, emotional, and spiritual support, strengthening resilience against mental health challenges.

Remember, experiencing a mental health condition is not a sign of weakness, and seeking help only shows how deadly, courageous, and strong you are. You are an important part a resilient Indigenous community, rich with cultural heritage. Living a fulfilling life with a psychotic illness is possible with the appropriate supports, services, and a treatment plan of your choosing.