

Early support for bipolar disorder made possible with Census data

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition characterised by depression and pronounced mood swings. Bipolar Australia represents 598,000 people affected by bipolar spectrum disorders, and the millions of family members, friends and health professionals who support them.

David Harper, Bipolar Australia's General Manager for Programs and Research, said Census data helps understand the impact of the disorder and reach people experiencing their first symptoms.

"We know the average onset age for bipolar spectrum disorder is between 18 and 21 years. Census data on population provides the age categorisations we need to calculate the number of young people who are at risk of developing the disorder," Mr Harper said.

"Targeted messaging about symptoms to people aged 13 to 30, and their families, allows us to work together to start treatment and management earlier."

Treatment for bipolar disorder typically includes medication, counselling, assistance for families and carers, and access to peer support. With the right assistance, the condition can be managed so the person can be free of symptoms for extended periods.

"Every person who has bipolar can experience recovery, and early intervention ensures people have the support they need as soon as possible," Mr Harper says.

"Accurate demographic data helps us target at-risk populations with information tailored to age, cultural and linguistic background, and education levels.

"Earlier recognition of symptoms can result in an earlier diagnosis so that people can get the support they need sooner. This can help to stabilise the disorder at lower levels of severity.

"We know the average time from onset to diagnosis is nine years. Anything we can do to move people into better care, instead of hospital, during this period will improve outcomes for those with bipolar and their families."

Bipolar Australia's Recovery Model of Care uses Census data to understand population segments by age, which informs its requests for funding. Grant applications for new initiatives, such as an online tool to help parents and young people recognise symptoms of bipolar disorder, rely on accurate Census data to support strong cases for funding.

"Everyone in Australia should complete the Census. Your participation helps build accurate demographic data, so organisations like ours can provide the right help, at the right time, to young people who need it," Mr Harper said.