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***Mental illness affects a record 3 in 4 people seeking addiction help in 2019
'Ice' and alcohol top drugs of concern : major frontline report***

A record three in four people seeking help for alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems in 2019 also had a mental health condition, according to a major report released today by one of Australia's largest drug treatment organisations, which also treated 24 per cent more people during the year.

Odyssey House NSW reports 77 per cent of its residential rehabilitation clients during the 2019 financial year had a co-occurring mental health condition: 1.4 times (42%) higher than 2017¹ (54% of clients) and more than seven times higher than 1999 (10% of clients).

Even in Odyssey House's ten community-based services (new since 2017), where clients may have less complex issues, more than half (53%) of people reported also having a mental health problem.

The **primary drugs of concern**² during the year were alcohol and methamphetamine, with 'ice' accounting for half of residential admissions (and one in three community admissions) and topping the list for the eighth consecutive year.

The **2019 Odyssey House NSW Annual Report: Reconnecting Lives**³ provides hard, frontline evidence that alcohol and other drug dependence, alone or alongside mental illness, is **a significant and serious health and social issue**, according to CEO Julie Babineau, who is also the newly elected President of the Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies⁴ (NADA).

"We've never seen this level of co-occurring disorders at Odyssey House in our 42 years of operation. The trend just continues to rise and it's hard to predict how much further the numbers will go," Ms Babineau said.

"Mental illness is increasing in the general population⁵ and more people are aware of mental health and seeking professional help, so this is likely contributing to the rising demand for our services.

"Odyssey House is also well known for treating people's drug dependence and mental health at the same time. Our holistic approach ensures people receive the comprehensive and integrated care they need for recovery from both of these complex health conditions simultaneously."

Common mental health problems among clients with co-occurring alcohol and other drug dependence included: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and schizophrenia. Twelve per cent had more than one condition.

Ms Babineau said the links between mental illness and addiction can be complex, with no clear cause and effect:

- People may turn to alcohol or other drugs to cope with or 'self-medicate' their mental health symptoms, which may in turn be related to life events, trauma or poor social circumstances
- They may have an existing mental health issue that is made worse by drug use
- Drugs may mask symptoms of mental illness that only become apparent after they stop using
- Mental health problems may be due to using or withdrawing from drugs.

“It takes real courage for a person to reach out for help and admit they have not only one but two health problems that are unfortunately still so **stigmatised and misunderstood**,” Ms Babineau said.

“As a society we are getting better at talking about mental illness, but we absolutely must shift the public conversation about addiction from a moralising, ‘just stop drinking or using drugs’ attitude towards one of ‘informed compassion’ and healthcare. Real people’s lives are at stake.

“One of our clients put it so well when she said: ‘Addiction is not a decision; it overtakes you.

“**Elaine**⁶, whose recovery story features in our report, is a businesswoman in her mid-fifties whose two glasses of wine gradually became two bottles a day.

“She was battered by a run-in with cancer, worn out running a business and family, and going through the motions in her crumbling marriage when addiction overtook her.

“Or picture **Michael**⁵, a depressed single father in his thirties with little family support, who turned to methamphetamine hoping it would help him cope with a back injury and financial worries, and be able to work longer and earn more to care for his young daughter.

“Both he and his daughter were homeless before finding a welcoming haven of support at Odyssey House’s Parents’ and Children’s Program,” she said.

“Our *2019 Odyssey House Annual Report* adds frontline evidence to the body of expert knowledge that Australia is in the midst of a significant public health issue that requires urgent action.

“Greatly increased federal and state government investment in alcohol and other drug services is essential if the not-for-profit sector is to meet the demand for treatment.

“Odyssey House hopes the report of **The Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug ‘Ice’**⁷, delivered to the NSW Government on 28 January, will prompt increased funding for early intervention, education and treatment, greater investment in the health sector workforce, and a more coordinated, whole-of-government approach.

“In the meantime, Odyssey House is trying to meet public demand for treatment by launching a short-term residential rehabilitation program, running more group-based community counselling sessions and offering evening meetings, and tendering for services around NSW.”

Odyssey House NSW is one of Australia’s largest alcohol and other drug rehabilitation organisations and helps people from around the country; 2815 clients were assisted during the 2019 financial year.

It provides a comprehensive range of residential and community-based treatment services for men, women and parents with young children, including withdrawal, short- and long-term therapeutic programs for substance use and mental health issues, educational sessions and after care.

Odyssey House can be contacted on 1800 39 77 39 or visit www.odysseyhouse.com.au.

Visit Odyssey House Media Dropbox for other resources including spreadsheets and charts:
<https://tinyurl.com/OdysseyHouseNSW>

For further media information or interviews with Odyssey House staff or clients, please contact:
 Carol Moore, Moore Public Relations:
 0402 382 363 carolmoore@moorepr.com.au

Snapshot: Key Trends/Facts from 2019 Odyssey House NSW Annual Report

Addiction affects people from all walks of life

Odyssey House helped 2815 clients during the 2019 financial year (2276 in 2018, up 24%):

- 2146 clients in its free community-based counselling services, a 34 per cent increase on 2018
 - 669 clients in its long-term residential rehabilitation program, similar to 2018.
- Clients ranged in age from 18-65+ years; the majority were aged between 25 and 44 years, accounting for 68 per cent in residential services and 61 per cent in community services.
 - On average, two-thirds of clients were male and one-third female across both services.
 - Twelve per cent of clients identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Alcohol admissions up significantly on previous years – a red (white?) flag not to be ignored

- Overall, one in three (32%) of Odyssey House clients named alcohol as their principal² reason for seeking treatment, up by 23 per cent (26% of admissions in 2018).
- Alcohol was the number one drug of concern for community services clients and number two in residential rehabilitation.
- **Alcohol admissions rose by 40 per cent in residential services, from 20 per cent of admissions in 2018 to more than a quarter (28%) of clients in 2019.**
- Alcohol admissions increased by 17 per cent in community services; it was the principal drug of concern for a third of clients, from 29 per cent of clients in 2018 to 34 per cent in 2019.

Methamphetamine admissions down slightly but remain a great concern

- Overall, one in three (33%) Odyssey House clients named methamphetamine dependence as their main reason for seeking treatment, down by 19.5 per cent (41% of admissions in 2018).
- **Methamphetamine or 'ice' was number one drug of concern for residential rehabilitation clients for the eighth consecutive year**, and number two in community services.
- Methamphetamine remained the leading principal drug of concern for residential rehab clients, accounting for half (49%) of all admissions; this was down 9 per cent on 2018 admissions, when a record 54 per cent of clients named ice as their main problem.
- Methamphetamine was second to alcohol for community services clients; admissions for ice accounted for 28 per cent of clients, down 22 per cent (36% in 2018).

Other principal drugs of concern in 2019

- Admissions for **heroin** dependence were down to their lowest levels on record, reported by nine per cent of residential rehab clients (down 31% from 2018); heroin was the principal drug of concern for 11 per cent in community services.
- **Cannabis** admissions were relatively higher in community than residential services, accounting for 16 per cent and 8 per cent of clients respectively.

- **Cocaine** admissions rose 75 per cent in community services, from 4 to 9 per cent of clients compared to 2018; cocaine admissions were stable at 2 per cent of residential clients.
- **MDMA/ecstasy** admissions as the principal drug of concern remained low, as were admissions for misuse of **prescription medications** like benzodiazepines/tranquilisers and painkillers/opioids e.g. oxycodone.

However, these drugs are often a second or third drug of concern for clients seeking treatment, and so remain a significant health problem.

Co-occurring mental illness highest ever, affecting majority of people seeking addiction help

- More than three-quarters (77%) of residential rehabilitation clients and half of community services clients (53%) undertaking treatment for drug dependence during the year also had a co-occurring mental health condition.
- This is the highest incidence of co-occurring AOD and mental illness in Odyssey House's 42 years: 1.4 times (42%) higher than 2017¹ (54% of residential clients) and more than seven times higher than 1999 (10% of residential clients).
- Common mental health conditions among clients included: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and schizophrenia.
- Twelve per cent of clients had more than one mental health condition.

¹ Mental health data not available in 2018 due to changes in reporting systems

² Most Odyssey House clients have poly-drug issues but nominate the principal drug that led them to seek treatment

³ Available at www.odysseyhouse.com.au/about-us/annual-report

⁴ The Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies is the peak organisation for non-government alcohol and other drugs services in NSW. It represents close to 100 organisational members that provide a broad range of AOD services including health promotion and harm reduction, early intervention, treatment and continuing care programs. www.nada.org.au

⁵ According to the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 15.9% of Australians aged 14 or older had been diagnosed with or treated for a mental illness in the previous 12 months, significantly up from 13.9% in 2013

⁶ Name changed to protect privacy; story features in *2019 Odyssey House Annual Report*

⁷ www.iceinquiry.nsw.gov.au