

National study of Australian women's mental health reveals hidden toll

Nearly one in two women with endometriosis or polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS) report depression, according to new national research, prompting calls for mental health support to be integrated into women's physical healthcare.

Women's Mental Health Australia's *Beyond the Surface* 2026 report found that more than half (56 per cent) of Australian women are experiencing mental health issues in 2026, including one in four (25 per cent) likely to be experiencing severe psychological distress. The key findings indicate that physical health conditions are associated with poorer mental health, but the greatest psychological impact is experienced by women living with female-specific physical health conditions.

Among women with endometriosis, 48 per cent reported depression and 47 per cent reported anxiety or generalised anxiety disorder. Among women with PMOS 47 per cent reported depression and 39 per cent reported anxiety or generalised anxiety disorder. These rates of depression and anxiety are between 1.6 and 2.2 times higher compared to women who do not have endometriosis or PMOS. The findings are based on a nationally representative research study comprising of 9,000 Australian women aged 18 and over, conducted across all states and regions in April 2026.

The report underscores the urgent need for a more integrated model of care, which is nationally consistent and standardised, where women receive mental health assessment and support as part of the treatment of their physical health condition, rather than having to navigate separate and disconnected services.

Women's Mental Health Australia Chief Operating Officer Katrina Locandro said the findings highlighted the gaps in our current approach to women's health.

"Women's physical and mental health issues are not experienced independently, so our health system needs to adapt instead of maintaining the status quo," Ms Locandro said. "Women deserve integrated models of care, where mental health assessment and psychological support become a standardised component of women's health services, including endometriosis, pelvic pain, menopause, fertility and pelvic floor care."

Women's Mental Health Australia calls for every woman attending a government-funded Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic to receive integrated mental health assessment and support as part of their care.

Report co-author Dr Jodie Pestana, a postdoctoral researcher in the School of Psychology at UNSW, said the data showed health professionals needed to recognise and respond to the full mental health burden of female-specific conditions.

“The research uncovered that conditions like endometriosis and PMOS double or triple the risk for women to experience mental health issues like PTSD, body image distress, and self-harm. Health professionals need to be educated on the increased risks so they can adequately care for women.”

The disparity also extended to suicide and self-harm rates, reported by 10 per cent of women with PMOS and 13 per cent of women with endometriosis, compared with 4 per cent of women across the full sample.

Report co-author Professor Bronwyn Graham, Director of the Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine, said embedding integrated mental health assessment and support into existing services was a practical and achievable next step.

“Women are being asked to manage two separate journeys, one for their body and one for their mind, and to find their own way between them at the point they are least able to,” Professor Graham said.

“The solution isn't building an entirely new system – we simply need to strengthen existing ones by embedding routine mental health assessments, training clinicians, and creating clear referral pathways within services women already attend, such as government-funded Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinics.”

The following mental health issues were more common in women with endometriosis compared to the overall sample:

- 43 per cent reported body image issues, 2.2 times higher
- 22 per cent reported obsessive-compulsive disorder, 3.1 times higher
- 22 per cent reported ADHD, 3.1 times higher
- 21 per cent reported post-traumatic stress disorder, 2.3 times higher
- 13 per cent reported suicide or self-harm, 3.3 times higher
- 12 per cent reported autism spectrum disorder, four times higher.

The following mental health issues were more common in women with PMOS compared to the overall sample:

- 40 per cent reported body image issues, 2 times higher
- 22 per cent reported post-traumatic stress disorder, 2.4 times higher
- 18 per cent reported ADHD, 2.6 times higher
- 14 per cent reported binge eating disorder, 2.8 times higher
- 10 per cent reported suicide or self-harm, 2.5 times higher.

While the rates of help-seeking increased in 2026, one in three women are still not seeking help for their mental health issues. The reasons range from believing they could self-manage (32 per cent) to financial cost (31 per cent) to not considering their mental health issues serious enough



to warrant support (29 per cent). Stigma and access also remained obstacles, with 19 per cent feeling embarrassed or ashamed, 16 per cent fearing judgement, 14 per cent finding services difficult to access and 13 per cent facing excessive wait times.

The prevalence and severity of mental health issues among Australian women have remained broadly unchanged since Women's Mental Health Australia began measuring these outcomes in 2022.

The Beyond the Surface 2026 report is available [here](#).

Women seeking mental health support can speak with their GP or contact services including: Lifeline ph 13 11 14 / text 0477 13 11 14; 13YARN (139276) (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people); Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 (24/7); Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636; Butterfly National Helpline 1800 33 4673.

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Women's Mental Health Australia

Women's Mental Health Australia is the nation's leading organisation dedicated to improving mental health outcomes for women across the lifespan. We work to ensure gender is recognised as a critical factor in mental health by advancing research, advocating for evidence-informed policy and reform, delivering education and resources, and investing in innovative community initiatives. By partnering with government, health professionals, researchers, community organisations and people with lived experience, we are driving meaningful change; where every woman, at every stage of life, is seen, heard and supported. Visit: <https://www.womensmentalhealthaustralia.org.au/>

The Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine

The Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine is an initiative of The George Institute for Global Health, the Australian Human Rights Institute at UNSW Sydney, and Deakin University, with support from collaborative partners the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI).

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