When someone you care about has mental health or addiction problems

A guide for family, whānau and friends
Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the people who have shared their experiences as family, whānau members, service users and practitioners within the mental health and addiction sector. Your contributions have been invaluable to the development of this publication.

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The Mental Health Commission has had a statutory function since 2007 to advocate for the interests of mental health and addiction service users and their families, whānau.

Families, whānau of all ages and from different cultural backgrounds continue to struggle during the early stages of seeking help for a family, whānau member or friend who may be having difficulties with their mental health or addictions. Early access to reliable information, support and services can reduce the distress and long-term effects for all concerned. Early access is particularly important for children and young people during their developmental years.

The well-being of the family, whānau is vital for them to be holders of hope. Knowledge and access to resources in the community are crucial steps in empowering families to help themselves and aid their own healing. These principles are at the heart of this booklet. We hope you find it a useful resource for you and your family, whānau.

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This guide will help you find out what services may be offered in your local community. Not all District Health Board areas in New Zealand offer the same services. You may want to fill in the blank spaces in this booklet with the names and contacts of people and services helpful for your family, whānau.
Introduction

This booklet provides information about how you can help your family, whānau member directly; how you can get outside help for them and for yourself; and some ideas on what you can do to support your own wellbeing.

Mental health and addiction problems do not occur in isolation. We are all part of communities with family, whānau, neighbours, work colleagues and friends.

Someone close to you may change the way they think, feel or behave in response to life events or how they perceive the world. These changes may become a problem for them – or for you – if it results in distress, a loss of quality of life or risky behaviour.

If the impact is serious, the situation may be diagnosed by a doctor as a health condition. It may be described as a mental disorder, mental illness, or addiction. The impact this has on individuals and families, whānau will depend on your resources, your cultural views and your family stories that help you make sense of life experiences.

“My husband began hiding things, not going to work, saying strange things. I had three children to care for. They were my first priority. In time we healed ourselves, with help from some really caring people who didn’t see us as sick individuals but treated us as a family going through a hard time together.”
What do we mean by family, whānau?

We recognise that there is a wide diversity of families within New Zealand communities.

For Māori, ‘whānau’ is about connecting with and supporting each other, either as an extended family unit (whakapapa, kinship), or in other chosen networks of people (kaupapa, purpose-driven).

In the same way, we use the word ‘family’ to describe the wide range of families that exist throughout New Zealand. We use the term “family, whānau” throughout this booklet to reflect this diversity.

Family, whānau is not limited to relationships based on blood ties. Family, whānau can include a person’s extended family, whānau, their partners, friends, advocates, guardians, or other representatives. In the area of mental health and addictions, the person receiving the service decides who their family, whānau is.

For children or young people up to the age of 18, parents and guardians may have decision-making powers that other family, whānau members generally do not have. However, in most cases, young people will be able to make their own health decisions from the age of 16.
The first signs that something is not right

If you are concerned that something is “not right” with a member of your family, whānau:

✱ Talk with them about what is going on. Express things from your own point of view. It’s more helpful to say “I feel worried when ...” or “Can you tell me about ...” than it is to say “You are acting strangely”.

✱ Think about which family, whānau member would be best at finding out what is going on for the person involved.

✱ Keep offering to listen.

✱ Search the internet or go to the local library – other peoples’ stories may help.

✱ Talk about seeking help from outside your family, whānau.

✱ Ask your family, whānau member what they would find helpful. They may want to try alternatives such as traditional healing, expressive therapies, or natural remedies such as dietary changes or massage.

If you have concerns about your family, whānau member’s immediate safety, take active steps to get help.
“I noticed my daughter staying in bed all day and staying up all night. She seemed restless and scared, not her usual chatty self. Her brother noticed it too – he was the best one to talk to her. He taught me how to be with her, how to talk less forcefully. I was worried and my words came out wrong. We decided together to talk to our local doctor. She told us about the community mental health and addiction services and a family support agency.”
Friends, neighbours and co-workers may be a source of support and assistance in helping you decide what to do. Some families, whānau find it useful to consult with a spiritual or cultural leader.

You can also call 0800 helplines in the phone book, or local support groups or health advocates for general information and assistance. Some suggestions are included at the end of this booklet – add your own.

Many addiction services will provide support to your family, whānau, even if your family, whānau member is not receiving treatment.

For help around alcohol and drug use, see *Living Well: Exploring strategies for the family and friends of people using alcohol and drugs* published by Kina Trust. You can get a copy by phoning the Alcohol Drug Helpline: 0800 787 797 or from your local drug and alcohol service.
“When the whānau asked me how she was, I said ‘Go and see for yourself’. Now they are not scared of her or anyone with mental illness, and I am not doing it all on my own. We go to the local marae where I get a massage and everyone looks out for our girl. She has taught us a lot about ourselves.”
How to get professional help

To get professional help:

＊ Contact your local health centre or doctor. Ask about referral to specialist services and family support agencies.
＊ See a counselor through your local school or health centre, or privately.
＊ Approach your local community mental health and addictions service. Community mental health and addiction services accept both self-referrals and family referrals. This service will be listed in your white pages phone book under Community Mental Health. You can also contact your local hospital. These services are provided free of charge.

Community mental health and addiction services are made up of different types of services. They include drug and alcohol services, kaupapa Māori services, maternal mental health services, and child and adolescent services.
Mild to moderate mental health problems can usually be resolved with the help of your local health centre or doctor. Treatment options include medication and talking therapies, as well as self-help options such as information and e-therapies.
“My partner said the thing that most helped him was when I stated my boundaries clearly – what I would and would not do. I never told him what to do even when he was acting very strangely. I told him I was getting help for me. That was true. He says that gave him a sense of safety when he was pretty scared about the millions of thoughts rushing through his head. He remembers really well how I spoke to him.”

How to support your family, whānau member

These are some of the things you can do to support your family, whānau member:

- Accept that their experiences are real. It’s OK to say “I don’t experience it that way, but I get that you do”.
- Understand that recovery is most likely to happen when the person having difficulties is leading their recovery themselves, rather than having decisions made for them.
- If there are things that your family, whānau member does not want you to do, respect their wishes – unless it will cause direct harm to them or to others.
- Help your family, whānau member to find employment, to stay in their job, to find suitable accommodation and to take part in activities that are meaningful to them. These can be some of the most useful things you can do to help.
- If what your family, whānau member wants when they are well conflicts with what they want when they are unwell, go with what they say when they are well. You could consider helping them to make an advanced directive – see page 15.
“One thing I can recall is that the people around me did not give up on me. They kept inviting me to do things. Then one day for no particular reason, saying yes to helping with the food shopping. It was a beginning. I slowly began to stand towards what was distressing me.”

Patricia Deegan on how her family supported her recovery – 1996 Recovery from the Heart
Advanced directives allow a family, whānau member to set out in writing what support and treatment they would like should they become unwell.

In an advanced directive they can identify which family, whānau members will serve what roles. For instance, flat mates might provide information during assessment, while Grandad might be willing to become a live-in mate for a while. An advanced directive can also state what level of participation the family, whānau as a whole would like to have during assessment and treatment.

A family, whānau plan-for-action provides more certainty, and access to a wider range of support should problems re-appear.

Your family member may also want to have an Enduring Power of Attorney in place which means someone else can make decisions about their welfare if they are not able to make decisions for themselves.

To obtain a copy of ‘Advance directives in mental health care and treatment: Information for mental health service users’ go to www.hdc.org.nz or you can phone the Office of the Health and Disability Commissioner to request a copy on 0800 11 22 33.
Caring for your own wellbeing

* Be proactive about self care.
* Wherever possible, maintain familiar daily routines.
* Decide what refreshes you – and do it regularly.
* Celebrate the good stuff.
* Ask yourselves how you are managing as a family, whānau.
* Give yourselves permission to seek support where needed.

The Kites Trust in Wellington has published a useful document, Kites Kids Plan, to help encourage discussion of mental health problems within families, and help kids work out an action plan if someone in their family, whānau is affected by mental health problems. You can download copies of the document from www.kites.org.nz/downloads.html.
Entering a mental health and addiction service

Most people who need mental health and addiction services are assessed and treated in the community.

In more serious cases they may need to be admitted into inpatient care, where they will stay for one or more nights. This is usually a voluntary process.

Ideally, a person will agree to treatment without being forced into it. This usually leads to better outcomes, and benefits family, whānau relationships.

However, in some situations when a person’s safety is at stake, special legislation may be used to ensure that a person receives assessment and treatment, even if they do not want it. Any concerned person can request that someone be assessed for mental disorder. See page 27 for information about compulsory assessment and treatment.
If your family, whānau member is receiving help from mental health and addiction services, you will have an opportunity to assist in their recovery by working in partnership with clinical services.

This partnership will be based on mutual respect. Family, whānau can expect to be recognised for the value they add to the partnership in terms of the care they provide, their skills and their background knowledge.

Your family, whānau member will be given the choice of including you in their assessment or treatment. Even if they do not want you to be included at the beginning, the services should still extend the invitation on future occasions, and discuss ways you can be involved.

When your family, whānau member first starts using mental health and addiction services you can expect to be given an information pack containing general information about mental health and addiction disorders, the risks and benefits of treatments, treatment options and available family support services.

**Family, whānau partnership with services**
Mental health and addiction services working in partnership with family, whānau will also:

* refer you to family support agencies who can inform, guide and address the needs of your family, whānau – whether or not your family, whānau member is receiving services or wants you to be involved
* provide access to interpreters and advocates
* welcome any information you can provide that might be helpful for the purposes of helping your family, whānau member. (Before sharing this information you may want to ask the clinician if they can keep it confidential if this is important to you).
* offer you a chance to meet with the clinician, with or without your family, whānau member present
* provide a guide to how you can make complaints, and an opportunity for your family, whānau to provide input into planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating mental health and addiction services
* often employ a family, whānau advisor to help provide for effective family, whānau involvement within the service.
Research has shown that family, whānau involvement during the assessment and treatment of mental health and addiction difficulties significantly improves outcomes and reduces relapse.

As family, whānau you can:

* request any of the services above

* assist your family, whānau member to refer him or herself through your local health centre or doctor, or approach the relevant mental health and addictions service directly

* decide which family, whānau members will be available for contact by mental health and addictions services, and what their role will be. An advanced directive can set this out clearly (see page 15).

* ask clinical staff to explain things in a simple way, without complicated medical terms or abbreviations

* ask clinicians how to interact with family members in a way that supports recovery

* ask if financial assistance is available to help with travel and accommodation when visiting your family, whānau member.
Some questions to ask

Following are some useful questions for you to ask clinical staff at mental health and addiction services.

- What is the name of the main person I can contact at this service (sometimes called a ‘case manager’ or ‘keyworker’)?
- What is the plan for treatment and discharge from inpatient care?
- What medication side-effects should we be aware of?
- How long before we can expect the medication to become effective?
- What do you recommend if medication does not improve things?
- How will I be informed of and involved in assessment, treatment and discharge meetings?
- How does this treatment plan support recovery?
- What else can we do?
- Where can I get support for myself?

Some services have a family support person, or you can be referred to a family support agency. The questions you can ask that person or agency include:

- Can our family, whānau get help with financial support during this time?
- Can we meet or talk to other families, whānau with similar experience?
- How do we access personal counseling?
- Are there any structured activities in our area such as workshops, support groups and education evenings?
- Is there respite care available for members of the family, whānau? (Respite care is short-term accommodation for service users and carers to give them time out.)
**Leaving inpatient care**

It is important to get things in place when your family, whānau member is leaving inpatient mental health care (being discharged).

Things are more likely to go smoothly where there is good communication and coordination between you and your family, whānau member, the clinical team at the inpatient unit, and post-discharge services.

To make the process easier, family, whānau can:

- be involved in discharge planning before it happens
- ask for information about how you can continue to help your family, whānau member in their recovery once they are back home
- ask about involvement in ongoing treatment planning
- ask about communication and coordination between you and your family, whānau member, the clinical team at the hospital, and post-discharge services
- be connected or referred to a family support agency.
“My son didn’t want me involved at first – he was too ashamed. They kept asking him though and it’s easier now. I don’t need to know as much as I thought. But when he stays with us I need to know about his medication.”

The Privacy Act: Does it affect family, whānau participation?

The Privacy Act 1993 and the Health Information Privacy Code 1994 set out when mental health services can release information about an individual.

If your family, whānau member is receiving mental health or addiction services they will usually decide whether or not they want information to be disclosed. If they are too unwell to decide this, their clinician will usually decide for them. The rules governing privacy of mental health information essentially say that if a clinician does not believe it is in the best interests of a person to disclose information, they do not have to disclose it.

However, mental health and addiction services working in partnership with families, whānau do not use privacy laws as a reason not to include families, whānau. Instead, they will ask how they can best involve family, whānau at this time.
Compulsory assessment and treatment

Your family, whānau member may receive compulsory assessment or treatment under the Mental Health Act or the Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Act.

For mental health, your family, whānau member may go into an inpatient unit within a hospital, or they may be treated under a Community Treatment Order in the community. For alcoholism and drug addiction, treatment is given at specially certified institutions.

For more information about compulsory assessment and treatment for mental health issues, see The Mental Health Act and Family Code of Rights booklets, which are available from local branches of Supporting Families in Mental Illness. (See the end of this booklet for contact details). You can read the Mental Health Act and the Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Act at www.legislation.govt.nz.
Section 7A of the Mental Health Act requires mental health services to consult with your family, whānau during the compulsory assessment and treatment process unless it is not in the best interests of your family, whānau member, or it is not reasonably practicable.

The clinician must consult your family, whānau member before deciding whether family, whānau consultation is in their best interests.

If you know your family, whānau member is receiving treatment and you have not been contacted, ask to be involved. If the clinician decides that consulting with you is not in the best interests of your family, whānau member, be sure to ask the reasons for the decision, and in what other ways you can be involved. You can take a support person to the meetings.

“It took a while for me to know that recovery of well being means something different for everyone in the family. Working out what it means for me has made me more understanding”.

This image is being used for illustrative purposes only and any person depicted in this image is a model.
“I am so glad I got support for myself and shared what I learned with my family”.
Emergencies
If you need emergency assistance call the emergency services (Police, Fire or Ambulance) on 111.
If there is serious or immediate risk that someone could be harmed, call 111 and ask for the Police.

Crisis
If your family member enters a state of crisis or extreme distress and you feel you cannot handle the situation on your own, get help.
Phone your local hospital and ask for the mental health crisis team. If your family member has received previous help from mental health and addiction services, you may choose to contact their case manager at the mental health and addictions service. Crisis service contact details are available at www.mhc.govt.nz.

Mental health crisis teams have different names in different regions. For example, some are called the Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (known as CATT) or the Psychiatric Assessment Triage Team (PAT). Mental health crisis teams are a mobile service and will help you manage the situation until an appointed clinician is available (usually the next working day).
**Help for your family member**

*Your local health centre or doctor:*

**Alcohol Drug Helpline:** Call 0800 787 797 (10am to 10pm) to find out what alcohol and drug services are available in your area.

**Local mental health and addiction services:** These are listed in your phone book under Community Mental Health or you can contact your local hospital.

**The Lowdown:** A website that helps kiwis understand and deal with depression. [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

**Headspace:** A website for young people. [www.headspace.org.nz](http://www.headspace.org.nz)

**John Kirwan’s** programme for depression. [www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)

*Look in your phonebook or search the internet and write down some 0800 helplines you find useful:*
Information support and advocacy for families, whānau

Supporting Families in Mental Illness has branches across the country that provide free and local information, support and advocacy services for the family, whānau of people with mental illness. To contact the branch nearest you, look in the white pages of your local phone book or call 0800 732 825.

Skylight*: 0800 299 100
Skylight is an organisation that provides support to children, young people, adults and their families, whānau through change, loss, trauma and grief – whatever the cause.

The Family Services Directory lists other support agencies in your area.
www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory/

Your local family support service:

For information on how to include families in mental health assessment and treatment, see the book Creating Partnerships: A New Zealand Guide to Including Families in Mental Health Assessment and Treatment by Whiteside and Steinberg (2003).

*Bice Awan, Commissioner of the Mental Health Commission, is Chief Executive of Skylight.
For more general information about mental health and addictions

The Mental Health Foundation
www.mentalhealth.org.nz

Kina Families and Addiction Trust
www.kinatrust.org.nz

The Mental Health Commission
www.mhc.govt.nz

Contact any of these agencies or your local Citizens Advice Bureau for further contacts.
For more information:

Email: info@mhc.govt.nz
or go to www.mhc.govt.nz