

underestimate the reality.

Several barriers fuel underdiagnosis and lack of treatment, including poor integration of mental health into primary healthcare, limited public awareness, high costs, and general stigma. Only 27% of people with severe mental illness receive treatment, with rural and township areas particularly underserved, having just 0,28 public-sector psychiatrists per 100 000 people.



The effects of untreated mental illness ripple across all aspects of life. It is linked to substance abuse, gender-based violence, and poor workplace productivity, the latter costing SA over R61 billion a year in lost earnings. Suicide claims approximately 23 lives daily.

Despite its heavy toll, mental health care receives only 5% of the public health budget, largely directed to psychiatric hospitals, leaving community services underfunded. If community-based care could be expanded, as indicated in the National Investment Case for Mental Health (2023–2030), it could restore up to R117,7 billion in productivity over 15 years.

The private healthcare sector also faces challenges. Conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder fall under Prescribed Minimum Benefits (PMBs), ensuring more comprehensive coverage. However, common conditions such as major depressive disorder often receive limited benefits. For instance, in-hospital treatments are capped at 21 days annually, leaving many patients to pay out of pocket.

Advocating for change

Advocacy efforts by public figures and mental-health campaigns are breaking down stigma and encouraging people to seek help. In addition, each of us can contribute by fostering open, honest conversations and checking in on our loved ones. On a personal level, healthy habits such as maintaining a balanced diet, regular exercise and mindfulness can promote mental wellbeing.

For those struggling with mental health issues, support exists in public clinics, hospitals, private providers and online platforms, but early recognition, consistent treatment and adhering to prescribed care plans are all key to recovery.

Staying aware of your overall wellbeing and recognising early warning signs – both in yourself and those around you – is essential.

Help is at hand

If you or your loved one is struggling with mental health issues, please reach out to the Wellness Team, our wellness partner ICAS, or contact SADAG on 0800 456 789 and LifeLine SA on 0861 322 322.



Click [h](#)
Dr Nka
and th
Health
full nev

Category

- 1. Our Wellness

default watermark