

INSIDEOUT

Institute for Eating Disorders

MEDIA RELEASE: Embargoed 6am Wednesday July 1, 2020

New Australian study aims to measure the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on eating disorders

KEY POINTS:

- **New Australian-first study to measure the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on eating disorders starts today.**
- **The research aims to improve future care and treatment delivery.**
- **Participants will complete several online surveys over the next one to two years.**
- **The survey is open to people diagnosed with an eating disorder or who experience body image concerns or eating difficulties, aged over 16.**

A new study by the InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders is seeking to better understand the short and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of Australians, particularly people living with an eating disorder.

The Australian-first study will measure, by way of online survey, the impacts of the crisis on symptoms, access and changes to treatment, social isolation and quality of life.

The two-year study will investigate the impacts of lockdown, and crucially, track the prolonged and ongoing impacts as the country reopens and new cases continue to emerge.

InsideOut's Research Lead Dr Jane Miskovic-Wheatley says that due to the novelty of the virus, and the unprecedented public health response, there is currently limited evidence on the short term and long-term impact of COVID-19 on pre-existing mental health concerns, especially for eating disorders.

"Australians' way of life has changed dramatically over the past few months, and for people with an eating disorder there are many unique challenges which can be extremely triggering," she says.

"A continued increased focus on hygiene and a general sense of heightened uncertainty are risk factors which remain."

"A big issue is social isolation. There is a direct link between loneliness and risk of worsening of symptoms."

“Even as public spaces re-open and social events start again, people with eating disorders are likely to continue feeling isolated.”

“Eating disorders are already an incredibly lonely illness. We’re asking people if this unprecedented pandemic has worsened their symptoms.”

“We know that people with eating disorders have a complex relationship with food and often need to follow strict diet plans. So, during the shutdown, not being able to access the foods you would normally buy and needing to stock-pile were potential triggers.”

Dr Miskovic-Wheatley says ‘*The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with eating disorders in Australia*’ study will also give insight into people’s experiences of transitioning their treatment from face-to-face, to telehealth services.

“This may be the opportunity to carefully consider the benefits of this change, especially if it gives people who need support more options.”

“Eating disorders are serious complex mental illnesses, with anorexia nervosa recording one of the highest mortality rates of any psychological illness,” she says.

“The study aims to help us understand the impact of unexpected circumstances on the mental health of Australians, especially those with eating disorders, to improve future care and treatment delivery.

“But for this study to be effective, we need the support of people with lived experience. We are reaching out to anyone and everyone who would like to share their experience with us.”

The survey starts today and is open to people aged 16 years or over, who have been diagnosed with an eating disorder or experience body image concerns or eating difficulties.

The survey can be found at www.EDStudy.com.au

To interview Dr Jane Miskovic-Wheatley contact InsideOut:

Steph Boulet 0424 722 407 stephanie.boulet@sydney.edu.au

Claire Aird 0424 850 449 claire@insideoutinstitute.org.au

The InsideOut Institute – a collaboration between Sydney Local Health District and the University of Sydney’s Charles Perkins Centre – aims to ensure every Australian living with an eating disorder has access to the best possible care by rethinking eating disorders from the ‘inside out’. Visit insideoutinstitute.org.au