

0 THE INCLUSIVITY PROJECT

BY THETA CLINIC · BENDIGO

A COMMUNITY GUIDE

Understanding Mental Health

From stigma to strength — understanding
mental illness, the conditions we face, the
resilience we carry, and where to find help.

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Understanding mental illness & stigma

Before anything else — what mental illness really is, and why there is no shame in it.

OUR PROMISE

Mental illness is a medical condition — not a curse, not a punishment.

ENGLISH

Mental illness is a health condition like any other. It can be understood, treated, and lived beyond. There is no shame in seeking help.

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தமிழ் • TAMIL

மனநோய் என்பது ஒரு மருத்துவ நிலை — அது சாபமோ தண்டனையோ அல்ல. உதவி கேட்பதில் வெட்கம் இல்லை.

WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

Mental illness is a health condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, and functions — just as physical illness affects the body. Conditions such as depression and anxiety involve genuine changes in the brain. They are common, they are real, and — most importantly — they are treatable. A mental illness is not a weakness of character, willpower, or faith.

ADDRESSING STIGMA

In many cultures, mental illness is met with silence, shame, or misunderstanding — treated as a personal failing, a family secret, or even a curse or a punishment. This stigma is itself harmful: it keeps people suffering in silence and stops them reaching out for help that genuinely works.

The truth is simple. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not shame. Mental illness does not discriminate — it touches every community, every faith, every family. And speaking about it openly, in your own language and within your own community, is exactly how stigma loses its power.



REMEMBER

You are not alone, and you are not to blame. Reaching out — to a doctor, a counsellor, or someone you trust — is a brave and important first step.

Common conditions

Three of the most common mental-health conditions — what they are, the myths around them, and what genuinely helps.

DEPRESSION

Major Depressive Disorder

You're not broken. You're human.

WHAT IS IT?

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is more than feeling sad. It is a medical condition that affects how you think, feel, and function every day — just as diabetes affects the body.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Sadness, emptiness or hopelessness
- ✓ Loss of interest in things you enjoyed
- ✓ Sleep changes — too much or too little
- ✓ Low energy or feeling slowed down
- ✓ Trouble concentrating or deciding
- ✓ Appetite or weight changes
- ✓ Feeling worthless or guilty

MYTH

"Just cheer up" or "push through it." MDD is not a choice or a weakness — it involves real changes in brain chemistry.

FACT

MDD is one of the most treatable conditions. With the right support, most people improve significantly.



A QUICK TIP

Small steps count. A 10-minute walk, a glass of water, or telling one person how you feel can be a real victory.

ANXIETY

Anxiety

Your worry has a name — and a treatment.

WHAT IS IT?

Anxiety is your brain's alarm system working overtime. A little anxiety is normal and helpful — but anxiety disorders cause worry that is excessive, persistent, and gets in the way of daily life.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Excessive worry that's hard to control
- ✓ Feeling restless or on edge
- ✓ Tiring easily or trouble sleeping
- ✓ Muscle tension or headaches
- ✓ Difficulty concentrating
- ✓ Avoiding what triggers worry
- ✓ Racing heart, sweating, breathlessness

MYTH

"Anxious people just need to relax." Anxiety isn't just nerves — it's a real condition involving the brain's threat-response system.

FACT

Anxiety disorders are highly treatable. Therapy (especially CBT), medication and lifestyle changes make a huge difference.



A QUICK TIP

Try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique: name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

TRAUMA

Complex PTSD

What happened to you is not your fault.

WHAT IS IT?

Complex PTSD develops after prolonged or repeated trauma — such as childhood abuse, domestic violence, or long-term neglect. It goes beyond standard PTSD and affects how you see yourself, others, and the world.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive memories
- ✓ Feeling numb or disconnected
- ✓ Intense shame or feeling 'damaged'
- ✓ Difficulty trusting or feeling safe
- ✓ Big mood swings
- ✓ Negative self-perception
- ✓ Relationship difficulties

MYTH

"You should be over it by now." Trauma changes the brain and nervous system — healing takes time and the right support.

FACT

Trauma-informed therapies like EMDR, somatic therapy and IFS have strong evidence and can lead to profound healing.



A QUICK TIP

Safety first: grounding yourself in the present — your surroundings, your breath, your feet on the floor — can help in hard moments.

The resilience of the Sri Lankan people

Understanding the collective trauma we carry — and the cultural strengths that help us heal.

Within a single generation, Sri Lankans have faced natural disaster, decades of armed conflict, terrorist violence, and severe economic hardship. Seeing this shared history together helps explain why **collective trauma** runs so deep in our communities — and why our cultural strengths have been such an important support in facing it, adapting to it, and recovering from it.

RECOGNISING COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

The impact of these events was never limited to those who faced them directly — it touched society as a whole. Hardship experienced collectively differs from private, isolated trauma, because it shapes the thinking and behaviour of whole families, communities, and generations.

2004**The tsunami**

The Indian Ocean tsunami took around 35,000 lives in Sri Lanka and displaced hundreds of thousands. Within hours, coastal communities lost their homes, livelihoods and loved ones.

1983**The war****–2009**

A 26-year civil war brought armed conflict, loss and grief to the north, east and south. Many families still live with distress and intergenerational trauma.

2019**The Easter attacks**

Coordinated bombings of churches and hotels killed more than 260 people, shaking the sense of mutual safety and inter-religious trust rebuilt since the war.

2022**The economic crisis**

Shortages of fuel, medicine and essentials, with record inflation, touched nearly every household — adding fresh strain on top of all that came before.

Taken together, these interwoven experiences show that many Sri Lankans — even if they never name it as such — carry some form of trauma, through direct experience, family history, or simply living amid national hardship.

The strengths that carry us through.

Alongside this hardship, Sri Lanka is widely recognised for the resilience of its people. Several cultural strengths act as genuine protective factors — helping individuals and communities rebuild and adapt.

Community & collective support

A collectivist society: in hard times, families and community networks pool resources and share responsibilities. Neighbours, extended family and religious groups step in — practically and emotionally — easing the burden on any one person.

Faith & spirituality

Buddhism, alongside Hindu, Islamic and Christian traditions, offers meaning, ritual and comfort in times of loss. Shared rites and collective mourning give people a structured way to grieve together, not alone.

Calming the mind & "letting go"

Buddhist philosophy has long emphasised *anicca* (impermanence) and meeting suffering with equanimity. These centuries-old traditions of mindfulness now inform modern, evidence-based therapies — mindfulness within CBT is a clear example.

Contentment & simplicity

A cultural leaning toward *santhutti* (contentment) — valuing what one has over accumulating wealth — helps many families adapt to hardship without it eroding their dignity or security.

Collective consciousness & shared meaning

Shared festivals and cultural or religious celebrations rebuild identity and continuity even after upheaval. The sense that "we are all facing this together" helps communities find meaning and a common story of rebuilding.

*These cultural strengths are powerful — but they work best **alongside**, not instead of, professional support. If you live with trauma, deep grief or persistent distress, please reach out to a trusted health worker, a counsellor, or the services in this booklet.*

Theta Clinic & treatments

Where clinical care fits in — and the modern, evidence-based treatments available in Bendigo.

About Theta Clinic

Mental health care that actually gets you.

Theta Clinic is a specialist mental-health clinic in Bendigo, offering evidence-based treatment for depression, anxiety, trauma and more — combining the latest neuroscience with genuine, culturally sensitive human care. It provides a structured, time-limited episode of care, working closely with your GP or referring doctor for your long-term wellbeing.

What is TMS?

Drug-free. Non-invasive. Powerfully effective.

- ✓ Gentle magnetic pulses stimulate mood-regulating areas of the brain
- ✓ About 20 minutes per session, no anaesthetic, you stay awake
- ✓ For depression when medication hasn't worked well enough
- ✓ Typical course: 20–36 sessions over 4–6 weeks
- ✓ 50–60% response in treatment-resistant depression

The Flow / tDCS device

Wear it, feel it, change your brain.

- ✓ A clinically validated home device (transcranial Direct Current Stimulation)
- ✓ Paired with a digital CBT therapy app; 30 minutes, 3× a week for 6 weeks
- ✓ Comparable to medication in some trials, with minimal side effects
- ✓ Prescribed and monitored by your clinician

Understanding your 291 assessment

WHAT IS IT?

A "291 assessment" refers to Medicare Benefits Schedule Item 291 — a comprehensive, one-off psychiatric assessment by a specialist psychiatrist. Think of it as an expert "deep-dive" into your mental health, history and treatment needs. It results in a detailed written management plan sent directly to your GP.

WHAT IT COVERS

Your current symptoms and how they affect daily life; your personal and family history; previous treatments and how you responded; your social supports; your response to any TMS treatment; and your relevant physical health. You may also complete brief psychometric questionnaires — there are no right or wrong answers.

WHAT TO BRING

Where possible: previous psychiatric/psychology reports and hospital discharge summaries; recent pathology (e.g. thyroid, iron, B12, vitamin D); any brain imaging reports; a full current medication list. For an ADHD assessment, also bring collateral history from someone who knew you in childhood, old school reports, and a recent ECG (required before stimulant medication).

MEDICARE & YOUR GP

Item 291 is Medicare-rebatable and can be claimed once per episode of care — which is why it is a single, thorough review. Your GP receives the written plan at the end of your care and uses it to guide your ongoing support, so we encourage you to book a GP appointment soon after.

GET IN TOUCH

We're here – before, during, and beyond your care.

Whether you're just beginning your mental-health journey
or seeking specialist treatment, you are welcome here
exactly as you are.

Theta Clinic

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A community initiative: thetabrainmind.com.au

PLEASE READ

Important — and where to get help now.

This booklet is for information and awareness only. It is general information, not medical advice, and it is not a substitute for professional assessment or care. Always speak with a qualified health professional about your individual situation.

If you are in distress or crisis, please don't wait — contact your local mental-health services or one of the free, confidential services below.

Emergency

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Life-threatening emergencies

Lifeline

13 11 14

24/7 crisis support

Beyond Blue

1300 22 4636

Anxiety & depression, 24/7

Bendigo Health Triage

1300 363 788

Local mental-health triage, 24hrs

In your language: call the free Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS) on **131 450** and ask to be connected — in Sinhala or Tamil — to any of the services above.

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