How do I become a mental health nurse?

With an undergraduate degree in nursing you can register to practice as a nurse and work in most mental health settings. However, to become a specialist, most nurses go on to study mental health at Graduate Diploma or Masters Level. Specialist mental health nurses may also undertake additional training in specific therapies, such as couple and family therapy.

Scholarships to study mental health nursing are available through the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) and through each State and Territory Department of Health.

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses website (www.acmhn.org) has information about how to become a mental health nurse, scholarships and the universities around Australia that offer tertiary courses.
Is mental health nursing for you?

Are you:
• a good communicator?
• a people person?
• a team player?
• someone others feel comfortable talking to?
• interested in the workings of the mind and why people do the things they do?

Mental health nursing is a career where people like you excel.

You have probably heard negative things about people with mental illness and even about mental health nursing. This is part of the everyday stigma faced by people with severe mental health problems and their carers, and is not always based in reality.

One in four Australians has a mental health problem – so you will probably know someone who has a problem of this kind. You will also appreciate that most people with mental health issues are just like you and me, trying to cope with life’s challenges.

Mental health nurses work with their patients and clients in many different capacities to manage their illnesses within the context of daily life, encouraging and assisting them to set and achieve life goals, managing their medication and caring for their wellbeing.

In reality, mental health nursing is a fun, rewarding and fascinating career.

What mental health nurses do

Mental health nursing is a specialised branch of nursing with a focus on the care of people with mental health problems, such as:
• anxiety
• depression
• addictions
• eating disorders
• psychosis
• crisis responses (e.g. those who have experienced a natural disaster).

As a mental health nurse you will:
• work closely with people from all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds
• work collaboratively with a range of other health professionals including medical doctors and psychologists
• work in a variety of settings such as community health, consultation-liaison (in emergency departments and maternity services), private practice, primary care (with GPs), hospitals, forensic services and universities
• develop a range of skills such as mental health promotion and screening, prevention, teaching, specialist counselling and psychotherapy, medication management, direct nursing care
• have opportunities to further develop your skills and qualifications, including via the Mental Health Nurse credential.