



# Anne Deveson Research Centre

A SANE Australia initiative

# SANE Help Centre Evaluation

A review of a professional  
counselling service for adults  
affected by complex mental  
health issues

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## Background

The SANE Help Centre provides counselling and support to adults affected by complex mental health issues. This includes people living with complex mental health issues, their carers, family and friends, and mental health professionals.

In 2020 SANE Australia conducted the first formal evaluation of the SANE Help Centre, including its helpline, webchat, and email services. This document presents a brief summary of this evaluation.

## Goals

The goal of the evaluation was to better understand who uses the Help Centre, why they use it, how it benefits them, and how satisfied they are with the service.

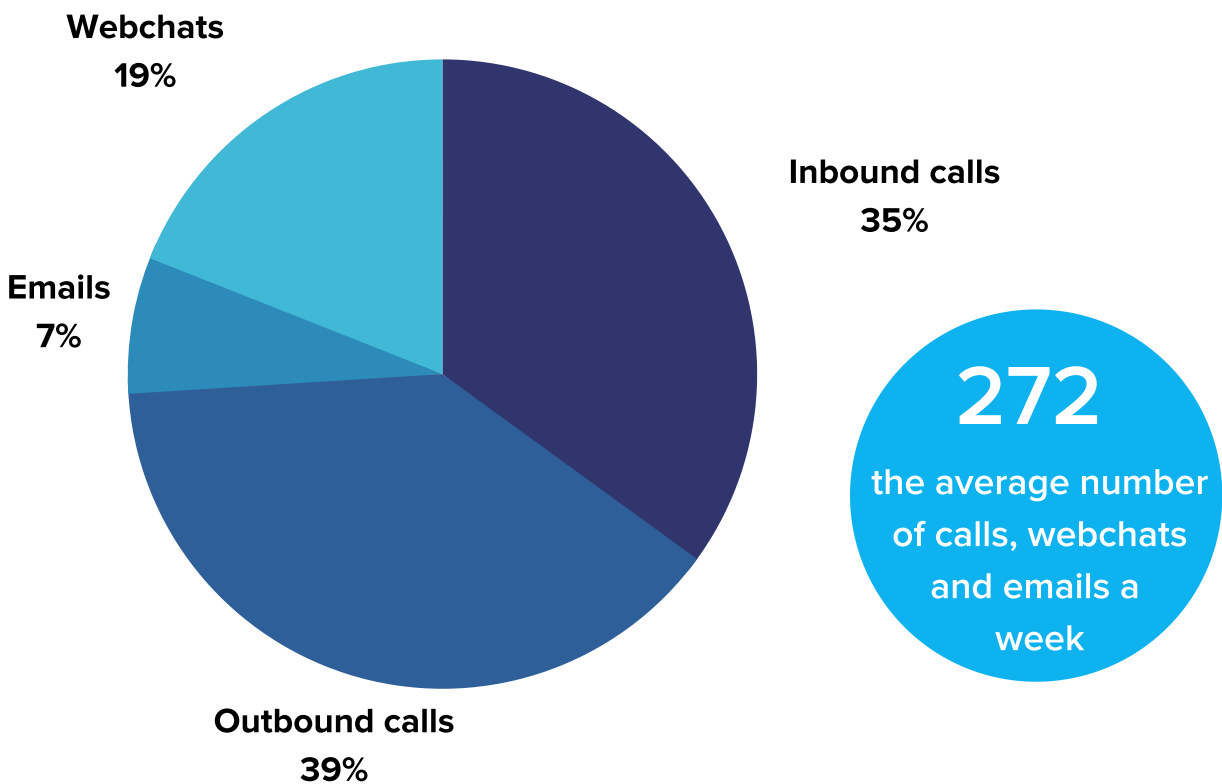
## Methods

During August to September 2020, we surveyed people that had used the Help Centre in the last year (i.e., service users). We also conducted interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how service users engaged with the Help Centre.

Information captured through our routine data collection was also used to understand the reach of the Help Centre.

## Reach and Engagement

During the evaluation period (26 April 2020 to 12 September 2020), the Help Centre provided its services through 4,676 phone calls, emails, and webchats. The phone line was the most frequently used service of the three channels, making up 74% of all contacts made to the SANE Help Centre.



We learned the following about our service users:



61% of service users were under the age of 40



Approximately two thirds of service users were female



66% of service users were from NSW or Victoria and 36% were from remote, rural, or regional Australia

# Survey and Interview Results

89 SANE Help Centre service users provide feedback through the survey. 80% of these participants were female, and the average age was 45 years. Nine service users were interviewed.

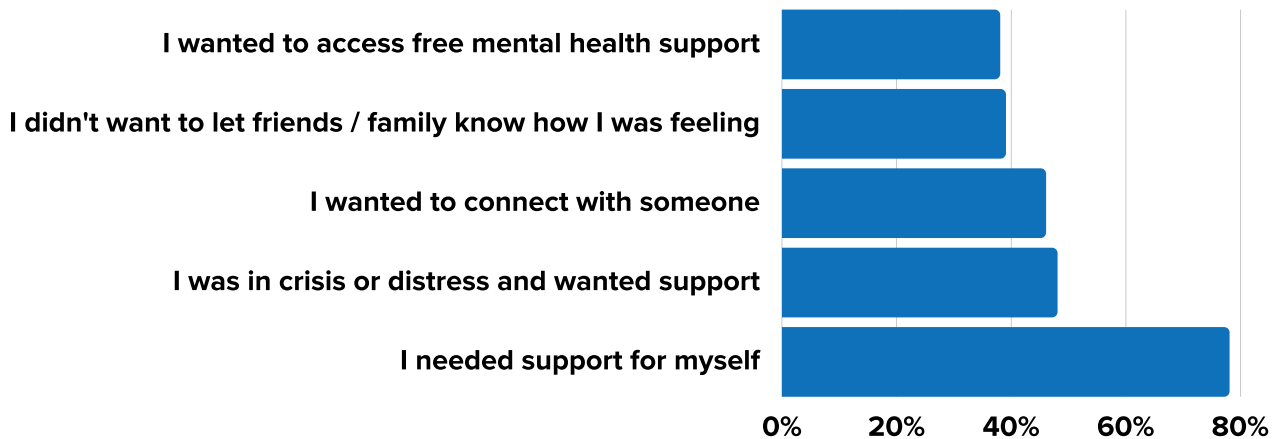
Participants reported experiencing a range of mental health issues, most commonly\*:

- *Depressive disorder*
- *Post-traumatic stress disorder*
- *Generalised anxiety disorder*
- *Borderline personality disorder*
- *Social anxiety disorder*
- *Bipolar disorder*

\*Participants could select multiple options, 88% selected more than one mental health issue.



Participants reported various reasons for contacting the Help Centre. The most common reasons are listed below:



“  
I've called for a variety of reasons, one was to find out information about different aspects of mental health, like asking questions about mental health issues and trauma and how to better deal with it.  
- SANE Help Service User

## Help Centre Experiences

We asked survey participants several questions about their satisfaction and experiences with the Help Centre. We found the following:

**77%**  
agreed that they  
were satisfied with  
the Help Centre  
overall



**Just I'm so grateful for the fact that the SANE helpline exists and that, this goes to all of the staff, they are saving lives. They are literally my superheroes. I hope they realise how meaningful their work is...**

- SANE Help Service User

### Experience with counsellors

- 82% trusted the information provided by counsellors
- 77% felt heard and understood by counsellors

### Mental health impacts

- 70% felt better after contact the Help Centre
- 61% learned where to get support because of the Help Centre
- 56% have increased knowledge of mental health because of the Help Centre
- 74% said they would contact the Help Centre again if they needed support

**SANE's current resourcing means we are unable to meet the demand for counselling. 23% of participants disagreed that Help Centre was easy to access and some service users expressed frustration with the availability of Counsellors**

**"I've given up quite a few times. When it's been unavailable for a certain amount of time, I just give up."**

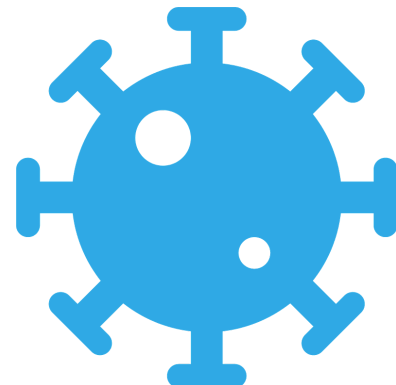
- SANE Help Service User

## Impact of COVID-19

54% said that COVID-19 had negatively affected their mental health or wellbeing

45% had to change the way they accessed mental health services due to the impact of COVID-19

21% had contacted the Help Centre due to the impact of COVID-19





**I feel heard. I mean, that's the biggest thing. The biggest and most important thing to me is the fact that I actually feel heard. Because with so many times where I've been overlooked, so many times I've been told how bad my symptoms are because nobody's been listening to me. The fact that I can actually be heard by someone that I can loop in with so quickly. It's really helped me and saved my life multiple times, to be perfectly honest.**

- SANE Help Service User

## Next steps

The SANE Help Centre team have considered how the results of this evaluation may be put into action to better meet the needs of its service users. These next steps focus on improving the availability of Help Centre, strengthening and maintaining counsellors' skill sets, and enhancing the way we collect data about the Help Centre. These next steps include:

- Promoting alternative ways to contact the Help Centre that reduce demand on the Helpline, e.g. book-a-call, webchat and email.
- Analysing service use data to optimise call-waiting times and Helpline/Webchat availability.
- Continuing to provide training to counsellors via professional development workshops. Training will focus on suicide, trauma, single session counselling, and person centre counselling as well as other issues commonly experienced by service users.
- Reviewing processes for supporting service users that may benefit from multiple counselling sessions (e.g. first time or regular service users).
- Revising and adjusting service-use satisfaction questions across helpline, webchat and email to be more consistent.

The SANE research team also hopes to publish these findings to enhance public knowledge about how to effectively deliver digital supports to people affected by complex mental health issues.

## Acknowledgements

The study team wish to give heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in this evaluation study, in particular the people that use and support our services.

## More information

For more information about the SANE Help Centre evaluation, please contact the research team through [adrc@sane.org](mailto:adrc@sane.org).