



FACTSHEET

ON WORLD BIPOLAR DAY 2021 SANE AUSTRALIA STRESSES THAT POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY TO REDUCING STIGMA

Media release: 30 March 2021

On World Bipolar Day, Tuesday March 30, [SANE Australia](#) says maintaining healthy and meaningful relationships with carers, friends and family is vital for people living with bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder is a medical condition which affects the brain causing extreme mood changes.

Some people mainly experience highs. Some experience mainly lows, and some experience both extremes. Bipolar disorder affects around one in 50 people at some time in their lives.

Of the 1,912 people living with complex mental health issues surveyed through SANE Australia's [National Stigma Report Card](#), 95.6% said they had experienced stigma or discrimination in their relationships in the previous 12 months.

Issues included relationships with friends, family, intimate partners, or in their role as parents or caregivers.

SANE Australia Peer Ambassador, Felicity Smith, shares her lived experience of bipolar disorder, recognising that through support and understanding from people she has relationships with, living with this complex mental health issue isn't a 'life sentence'.

Mrs Smith says her network of close, supportive relationships has been critical to her feeling comfortable to share her experience and educate others.

As a mother, wife and full-time employee, Mrs Smith from Newcastle, NSW, says that having open communication with her husband, children, extended family, and work colleagues has been incredibly important to her.

"The support from those around me is amazing," Mrs Smith said.

"My husband and I have very open communication about how I'm feeling day-to-day, which

has helped me so much.

“He has even implemented some of those strategies at his own workplace to ensure his colleagues feel valued and supported, so they know that he cares about how they are.

Mrs Smith says she has been very open about living with bipolar disorder with her employer and work colleagues, and they now know some of the cues to look for if she’s having a bad day.

“My workmates know that if I arrive at the office and my physical appearance is different, like not wearing make-up, or if my outfit is a bit untidy, that I might be struggling that morning and to check in on me, or not put too much pressure on me that day.

“I’ve been open with them about living with bipolar disorder, but for them to learn, understand and be more educated in what I’m experiencing has helped a lot.”

Mrs Smith’s 19-year-old daughter also lives with bipolar disorder II and borderline personality disorder, and she believes her own experience with a mental health issue has helped to support her daughter.

“I take time to observe my daughter’s behaviour and interactions with people to see how she feels after certain situations, and have also taken time to understand and adapt to how she likes to be communicated with,” she said.

Mrs Smith says that of course there is still progress to be made, and it can be difficult when people aren’t as understanding.

“It can be frustrating when people assume because I take medication, I should be fine. Medication helps, but it doesn’t remove all of my bipolar symptoms.”

“It’s wonderful to hear positive stories like Felicity’s,” SANE Australia CEO, Rachel Green said.

“It is important that people living with bipolar disorder are supported by people around them, at work, at home and in the community so they can live full lives, free from stigma and discrimination,” Ms Green said.

“We want more people who live with complex mental health issues to experience support like this too.”

To learn more, and to participate in conversations about bipolar disorder with people with lived experience you can, [visit SANE Australia’s dedicated web page for World Bipolar Day.](#)

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To request an interview with SANE CEO Rachel Green or Peer Ambassador Felicity Smith contact: Jaimee Damon, StigmaWatch and Media Coordinator, 0421 847 303 This email address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it.

[About SANE Australia](#)

SANE Australia is a national mental health charity dedicated to making a real difference in the lives of people affected by complex mental health issues through support, research and advocacy. SANE’s vision is for an Australia where people affected by complex mental health issues live long and fulfilling lives, free from stigma and discrimination. SANE Support Services

include phone and online counselling and online forums for people with a lived experience of complex mental health issues, their friends and family members.

About the National Stigma Report Card

The **National Stigma Report Card** is the flagship project of the [SANE Australia's Anne Deveson Research Centre](#) and is conducted in partnership with the [Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences](#) at the University of Melbourne.

The **National Stigma Report Card** is informed by the **Our Turn to Speak** survey, which ran between October 2019 and March 2020. This survey captured the experiences of stigma and discrimination across several life domains from almost 2,000 Australians living with complex mental health issues.

For research findings and stories from people impacted by stigma and discrimination go to www.nationalstigmareportcard.com.au. To compare survey results from different life domains, mental health issues and demographics via the interactive online data explorer go to www.nationalstigmareportcard.com.au/data.