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Mental health key concern for kids

Kids Helpline today revealed that mental health-related issues now account for two-in-five counselling sessions.

Kids Helpline General Manager Wendy Protheroe said, according to the national counselling service's Annual Overview into the concerns of young Australians, counselling sessions had increased by 4 per cent, rising to 53,111 sessions during 2009.

"Disturbingly, of those 145 counselling sessions each day, 57 are about mental health-related concerns, such as diagnosed mental illnesses, habitual or problematic drug use, continued disordered eating behaviours, self-injury and suicidal thoughts," she said.

"That means every 10 minutes our counsellors are speaking with children and young people who are in distress and require counselling and every 25 minutes these counselling sessions relate to mental health concerns.

"Kids Helpline is now a significant provider of mental health services for children and young people across Australia and we are often the only option the young have for support, particularly after hours or in regional and remote communities."

Mental health-related issues are also the main concern for young people who contact Kids Helpline online.

"More than 40 per cent of all online counselling sessions during 2009 had to do with mental health-related concerns, representing the top reasons for contacting counsellors online," Ms Protheroe said.

"Increasingly, more young people want to speak about serious and complex concerns like mental health online rather than on the phone.

"This form of counselling takes more than twice as long as phone counselling and our ability to respond is capped as we simply do not have the funding available to extend the hours.

"Web counselling is not available 24 hours a day; we open the service for 50 hours each week."

Kids Helpline is increasingly involved with ongoing or case managed clients, usually regarding mental health issues.

"We have become a vital part of youth mental health services in this country, frequently working with the young person's general practitioners or psychologists to have a safety plan in place. But who responds to that young person at night time, when most of the health clinics are closed? Kids Helpline does."

Ms Protheroe stressed that the statistics aren't all doom and gloom.

"So hopefully what we are seeing is that this generation is willing to reach out for help and talk about their concerns," she said.

"Being there at the end of the phone, email or web-chat session really does mean that we can save young lives."

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