

# CONCURRENT DISORDERS

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH



Research indicates rates of up to 50 per cent of alcohol and drug use amongst people with severe mental health problems. The Department of Human Services Victoria (2007) cites depression and anxiety as the most prevalent disorders co-occurring with drug and alcohol misuse, although rates of drug use among people with psychosis are also high.



### What is a Concurrent Disorder?

Concurrent disorder refers to someone who is affected by both a mental health illness and a substance use problem. Mental illness and substance use interact to make each diagnosis worse and to have serious, adverse effects on many areas of functioning (including work, relationships, health, and safety). People who are diagnosed with both a substance abuse issue and a mental health illness are referred to as having a dual diagnosis.

[www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Mental\\_Illness\\_and\\_Drug\\_Addiction](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Mental_Illness_and_Drug_Addiction)

### Signs and symptoms that an employee may be experiencing a concurrent disorder include but are not limited to:

- Reduced concentration and memory
- Lack of energy and motivation in undertaking what were usual work tasks and activities
- Loss of interest in personal hygiene and self-care
- Appearing less engaged and more irritable
- Loss of interest in activities and becoming withdrawn and socially isolated
- Preoccupation with obtaining or using substances
- Experiencing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, psychosis and suicidal thoughts
- Having a hangover or experiencing withdrawal symptoms
- Experiencing family or social difficulties such as relationship breakdown, financial or work problems
- Legal problems

### What causes concurrent disorders?

The relationship between mental health and substance abuse is complex and varies between individuals. It is unknown exactly what causes concurrent disorders; however it is understood that a variety of genetic and environmental factors make some people more vulnerable to either or both mental health and substance abuse problems.

In some cases a person may use substances to self-medicate and relieve symptoms of an existing mental illness, whilst in other cases the use of alcohol and drugs may make a mental health condition worse or even trigger the onset of one i.e. psychosis.

Some work related factors that may contribute include:

- High stress
- Low job satisfaction
- Working long hours
- Repetitious duties
- Periods of inactivity or boredom
- Remote or irregular supervision
- Having easy access to substances

If you (or someone you know) are exhibiting signs of a concurrent disorder, you should seek help. Consider talking to your doctor or contact an organisation that can provide advice and support: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) & [www.mhfa.com.au](http://www.mhfa.com.au). If changes need to be made in the workplace to support you, talk to your supervisor or to your [HR Adviser](#). The University's Employee Assistance Program (<http://www.deakin.edu.au/hr/ohs/assistance.php>) may also assist.