
Support groups

Summary

- A support group is a group of people meeting to share information, experiences, problems and solutions.
 - If you are feeling overwhelmed by an illness or condition, talking with people who have been through the same experience can help.
 - Find a support group by asking your local doctor or asking other people with the same condition as you.
 - Once you consider joining a support group, see what you can find out about it.
-

Support groups allow you to interact and connect with people who have been in a similar situation to you. Sharing information about similar experiences can help you understand more about your own situation and give you an opportunity to feel 'heard'.

A support group is a meeting of people – either physically or online – to share information, experiences, problems and solutions, often relating to health or social problems.

Types of support groups

Support groups can be general or specific and may be useful for you or for your family members and carers.

There are lots of support groups in Australia. Many have regular meetings held in places like healthcare services, community centres, local halls or council meeting rooms. They may have guest speakers or participants who share their experiences, along with refreshments and time for socialising. Other support groups are online and offer a variety of ways to connect with people from all round the world, who are also going through a similar experience. You may interact with others in online support groups via message boards, chat forums and social media.

Value of support groups

Support groups allow you to share your experiences with people who have been in or are currently experiencing a similar situation.

Support groups can help you in many ways by:

- showing you that you are not alone
- providing you with emotional and social support
- helping you develop new skills and adjust to your situation
- allowing you to share information about your situation and how you feel
- discussing things like symptoms, treatment and side effects
- offering advice and a place to learn from others
- giving tips on how to live with your condition or illness
- improving motivation.

In an online health support group, you can stay anonymous if you want to, which can be important if you feel embarrassed about your condition or feel apprehensive about speaking openly with others. It doesn't matter where you live, you don't have to leave your home to join in. With message boards and social media, you can be part of the group at any time of day or night. All you need is a computer or tablet with internet access.

Finding a support group

To find a support group, you can:

- ask your doctor or specialist
- check with staff at your local hospital or community health centre
- ask someone you know who has experience with the same condition or healthcare need
- look online or in the phone book
- search the **Services & support**
(<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/servicesandsupport>)
gateway on this website.

Before joining a support group, see what you can find out about it and its reputation. Look at the group's website or contact the organiser directly and ask:

- who runs the group (check if it has a religious or particular philosophical bias)
- how the group is funded (there may be a conflict of interest if it is funded by a particular company or organisation.
- will you have to pay a membership fee)

- where the group meets and how often
- how the group works (it may be ongoing, where new members can join at any time, or it may run for a set number of weeks with the same members there every week)
- why the group was formed and what its purpose is (it may have been formed by people opposed to a particular treatment, or by researchers trying to recruit people for a study)
- where the group gets its information from (is it based on quality research or on the experience of people with a particular condition? Both are valid, but it is good to know this before you join).

Things to be aware of with support groups

Support groups are often run by volunteers or people who have had experience with the condition. They may not be healthcare professionals or trained counsellors. If you receive advice about treatments or healthcare professionals, check with a healthcare professional you trust, such as your local doctor, before starting on a new treatment regimen or using a new or additional service.

Tell your doctor if you plan to stop the treatment they have prescribed and explain why. It is important that you understand any risks involved in stopping a treatment.

Find out who runs the group (including online groups). It may be a government healthcare organisation (such as the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre), a non-profit organisation (such as Alzheimer's Australia) or someone who has experienced the condition. By knowing who runs the group, you'll be able to find out if the group has another motivation behind it – for example, a company trying to promote its products.

It's also a good idea to check for any financial or religious ties that may influence their advice on particular matters such as treatments.

Be wary of giving out personal information to other members of the group (particularly if it is online) for example, there is no reason you need to provide your full name or date of birth to a support group and you may not wish to discuss your financial situation or give out detailed healthcare information. To find out more about your rights when it comes to privacy see our privacy and confidentiality fact sheet. [\[link to new fact sheet\]](#)

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Counsellor

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:



Department of Health
(<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/>)

(<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/>)

View all planning and coordinating healthcare →

(<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/servicesandsupport/planning-and-coordinating-healthcare>)

Content disclaimer

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

Reviewed on: 14-10-2015



The Victorian Government acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

The Department of Health celebrates, values and includes people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.

Privacy statement: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/about/privacy>

Copyright notice: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/about/terms-of-use>

Disclaimer notice: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/about/terms-of-use>

This web site is managed and authorised by the Department of Health, State Government of Victoria,
Australia © Copyright State of Victoria 2021.