



Anne Deveson Research Centre

A SANE Australia initiative

SANE Forums Evaluation

Summary of findings from the
SANE Forums evaluation 2020

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Goals and Methods

The SANE Online Community Forums (SANE Forums) involve two online communities:

- one for people living with complex mental health issues (Lived Experience Forum)
- one for those supporting someone living with complex mental health issues (Carers Forum).

The 2020 SANE Forums evaluation aimed to identify whether the SANE Forums are meeting their goals. These goals include creating strong communities, extending the reach of mental health services, and providing high quality peer support.

This study included the following:

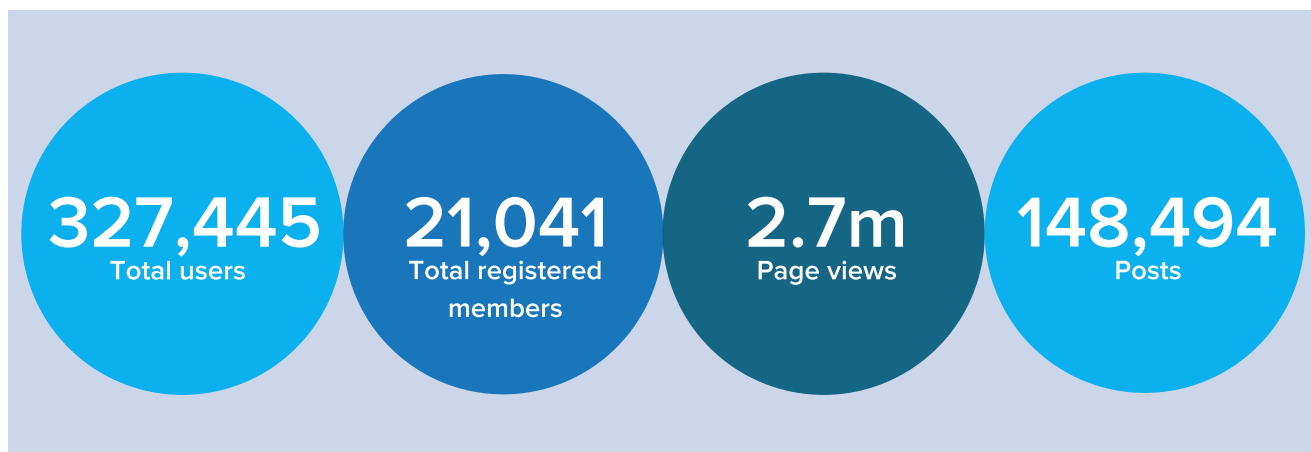
- A review of reach and engagement data (from online tools: Khoros Community Analytics and Google Analytics)
- An online survey of people who access the Forums ('Forum Users')
- In-depth interviews with Forum Users

We collected data from Forum users in July-August 2020. We also reviewed reach and engagement data for the period July 1 2019-June 30 2020.

The study was approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee, Bellberry Limited (Protocol 2018-06-417).

Reach and Engagement

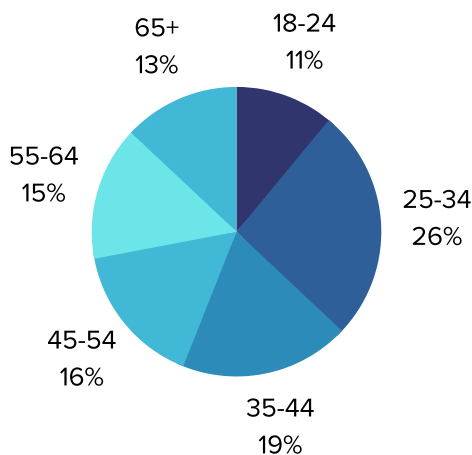
The SANE Forums had a busy year. Member registrations increased by 33% during the evaluation period (July 1 2019-June 30 2020). Most activity (90%) was on the Lived Experience Forum. There was a 55% increase in weekly users from April 2020 onwards, aligned with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and Australian lockdowns.



We also learnt more about Forum users during the evaluation period:



Approximately two thirds of users were female



Users ranged across the lifespan



35% of registered members were from rural, regional or remote Australia

“I really appreciate how welcoming and well moderated the Forums are. It feels like a safe space.”
Written survey response

Survey and Interview Results

In total, 263 Forum Users provided feedback through an online survey. 72% of participants were female, and the average age was 48 years. Eleven Forum Users were also interviewed through phone or Zoom.

Forum Users reported experiencing a range of mental health issues, most commonly:

- *Depression*
- *Anxiety disorders*
- *Post-traumatic stress disorder*
- *Bipolar disorder*
- *Schizophrenia*

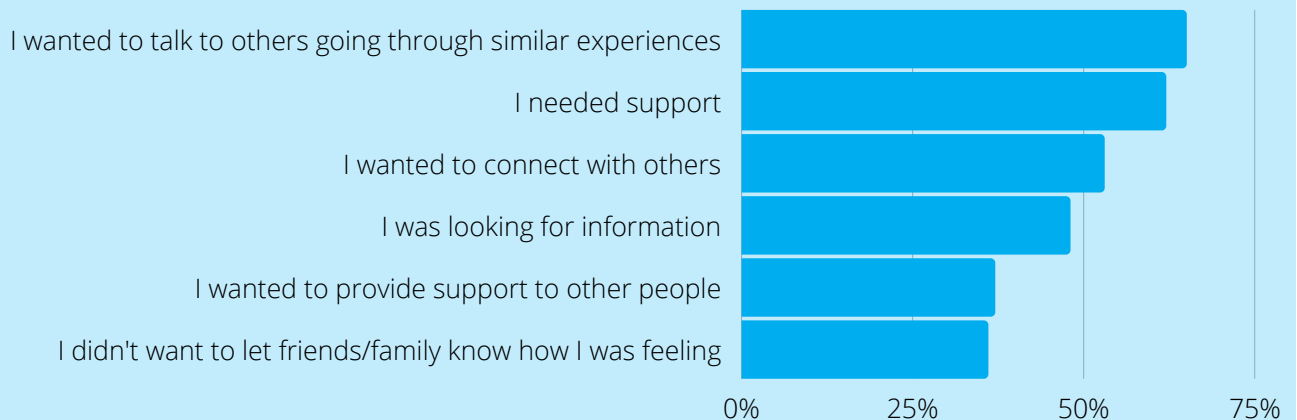
57%

reported moderate-severe distress on the Patient Health Questionnaire-4

46%

felt that their current level of professional support was not meeting their mental health needs

Forum Users reported a wide range of reasons why they had visited the Forums in the last 12 months. The most common are presented below.



47%

felt COVID-19 had negatively affected their mental wellbeing

“During lockdown and these kind of current times that we're in, [the Forum] gives people a community. A virtual community.”
'Nathan', 52

Usability, safety, mental health and connection

We asked Forum Users detailed questions around four themes:



I actually got a bit lost when I first started... It's a bit of a learning process.

'Eric', 52

Usability

- 53% agreed that they find the SANE Forums easy to use
- Forum Users gave suggestions to improve navigation and readability, such as adding a 'how to navigate' section and reducing text on each page

Sense of safety

- 72% agreed that they felt safe to participate on the SANE Forums
- 68% agreed that the moderation and guidelines keep the Forums safe

Mental health impacts

- 47% agreed that they have increased knowledge of mental health because of the Forums
- Some Forum Users felt that the Forums had directly (or indirectly) improved their mental health

Connection

- 53% agreed that they feel a sense of connection with others on the Forums
- Many formed friendships with other members
- Many found value in helping other members



Being able to share with other people and have your experience validated by someone who really gets it.

That's not always someone with the same diagnosis, sometimes it's just someone who's a caring person and really listens to you.

'Rowena', 57

Next steps

The SANE Forums team are considering the recommendations below. We will be looking at how we can translate the study's findings to make the Forums even better.

Recommendations include:

- Improving usability by making the Forums easier to read and more intuitive to navigate
- Improving awareness of the Forums Community Guidelines
- Improving inclusiveness of the Forums

The study team hope to publish the findings in a peer-reviewed journal. We also plan to publish findings from past evaluation studies.

Acknowledgements

The study team wish to give heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in this evaluation study.

“It was nice to contribute to a community... it was also really nice to hear other people's experiences and to just know that I'm not the only one out there.”
‘Yrene’, 25

More information

For more information about the SANE Forums evaluation, please contact the study team through adrc@sane.org.