

# A snapshot of mental health issues and extent of unmet treatment need among clients of the Kirketon Road Centre (KRC) - a primary healthcare service for marginalised populations

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## INTRODUCTION

The Kirketon Road Centre (KRC) provides a range of services including drug treatment and general medical care for mental health issues. While a proportion of clients engage with the service specifically for their mental health issues, the extent of mental health problems and unmet treatment need generally among clients is unknown. This is because questions about mental health and current treatment are not routinely asked of all clients attending the service.

## KIRKETON ROAD CENTRE

KRC is a primary healthcare service in Kings Cross, Sydney, which provides free, accessible, and equitable healthcare for population groups who traditionally experience multiple barriers accessing health services. Services are targeted to young people, people who sex work, people who inject drugs, people from LGBTI communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people experiencing homelessness. KRC provides over 2000 episodes of care each month for general medical care, sexual health, mental health, counselling, NSP, OAT and HCV treatment.

## AIMS

We aimed to:

- Assess quality of clients' care by providing a snapshot of clients' mental health, current treatment and perceived treatment needs; and,
- Identify gaps in service delivery and inform funding initiatives which target mental health.

## METHOD

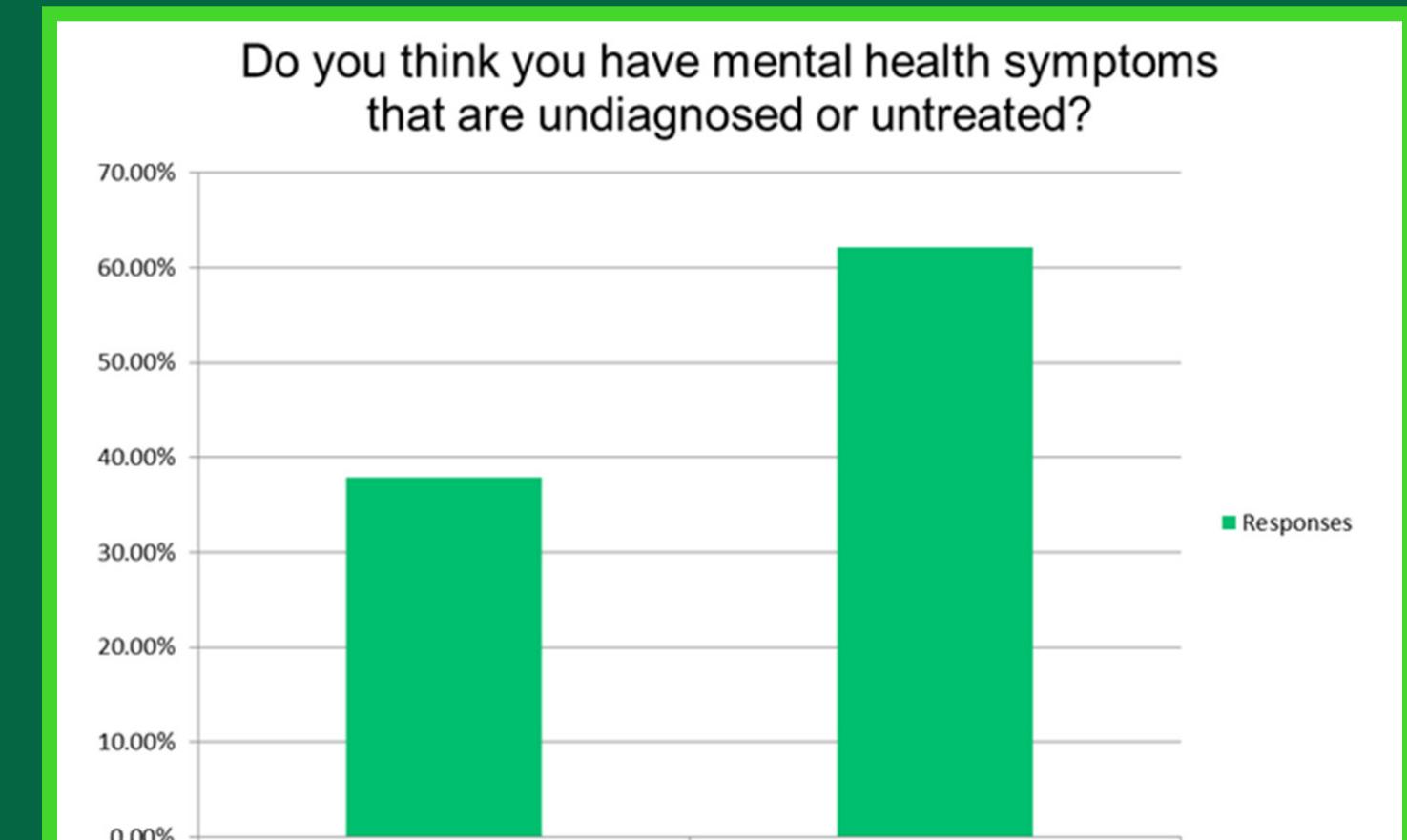
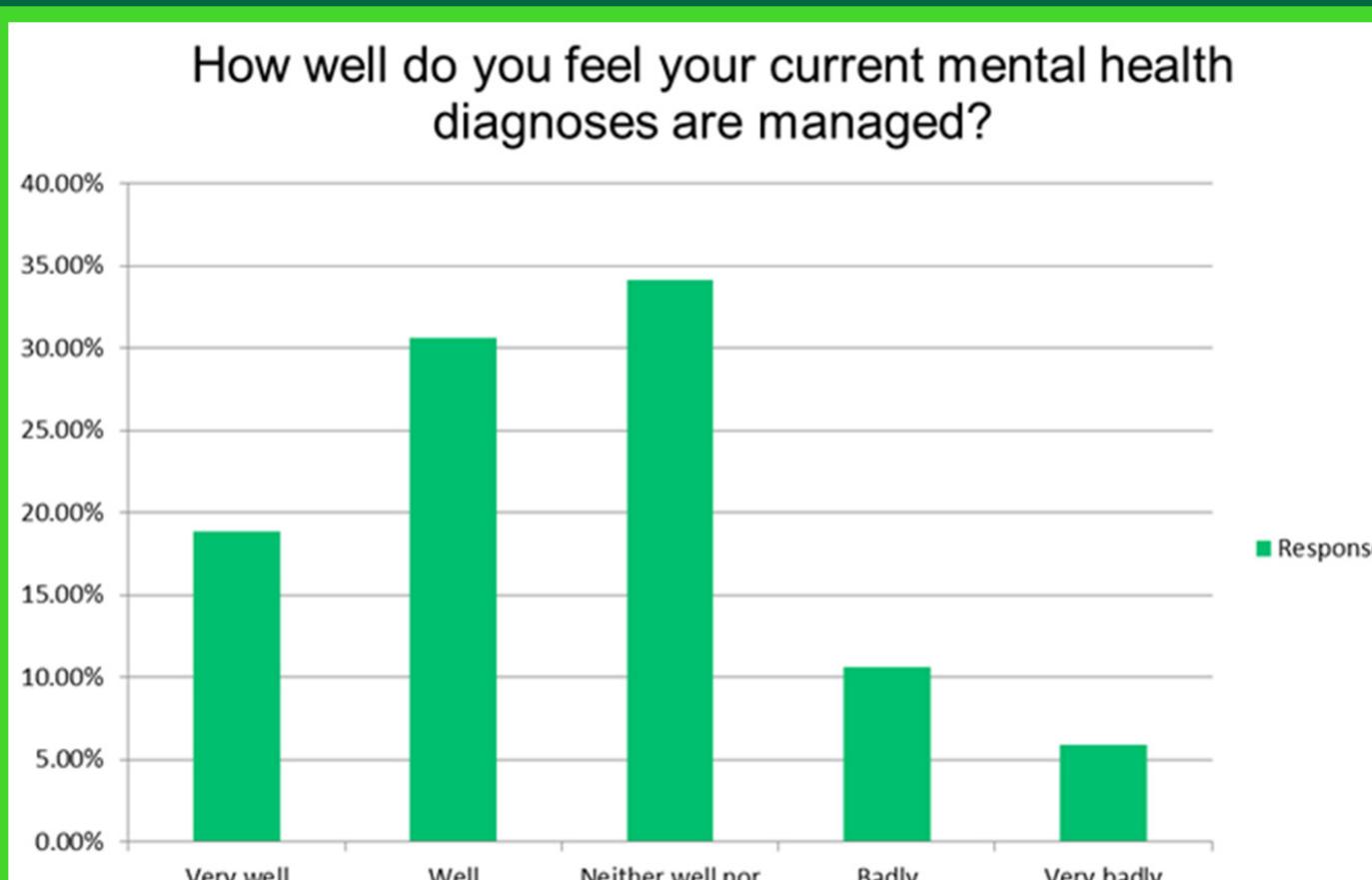
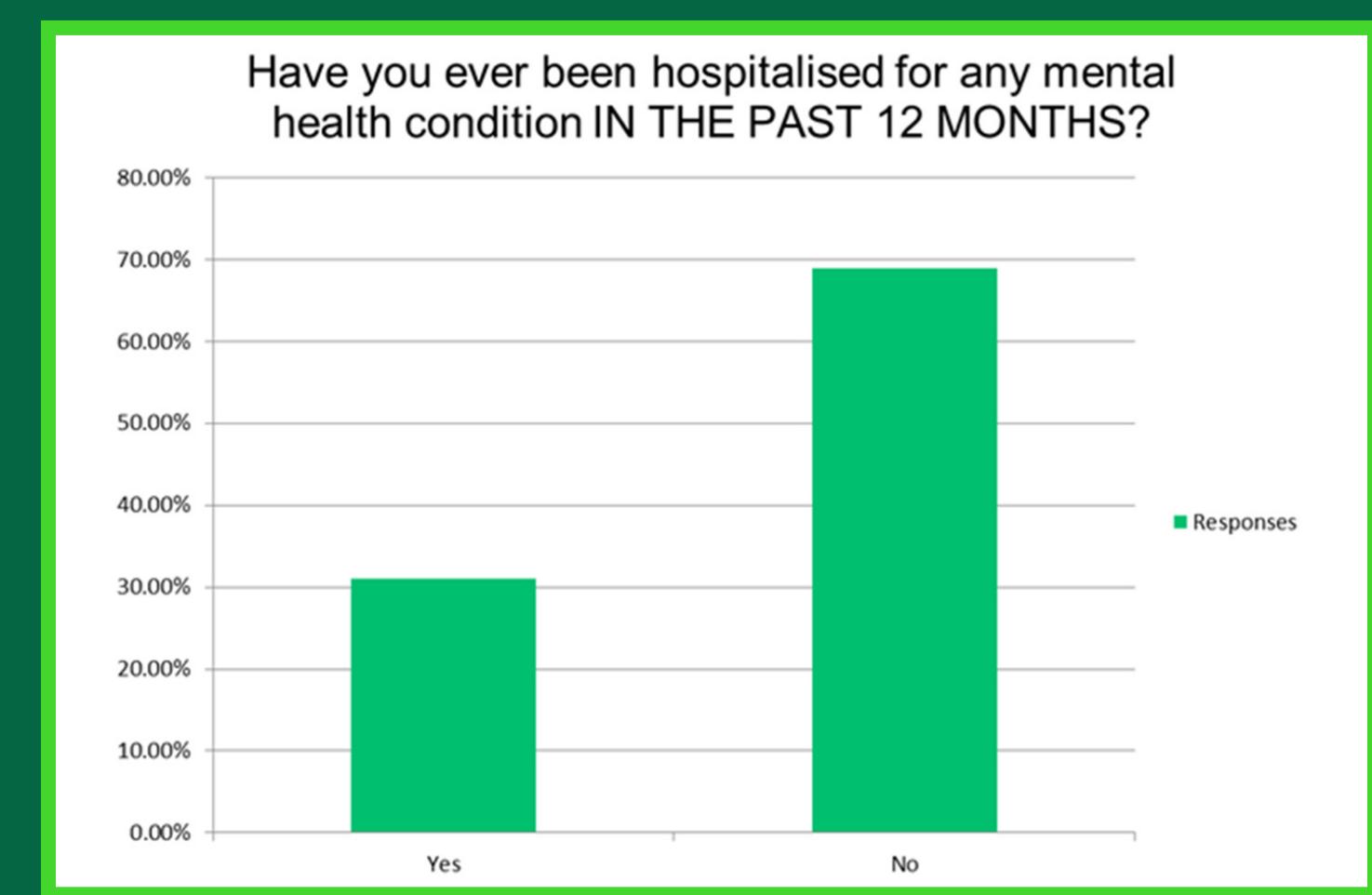
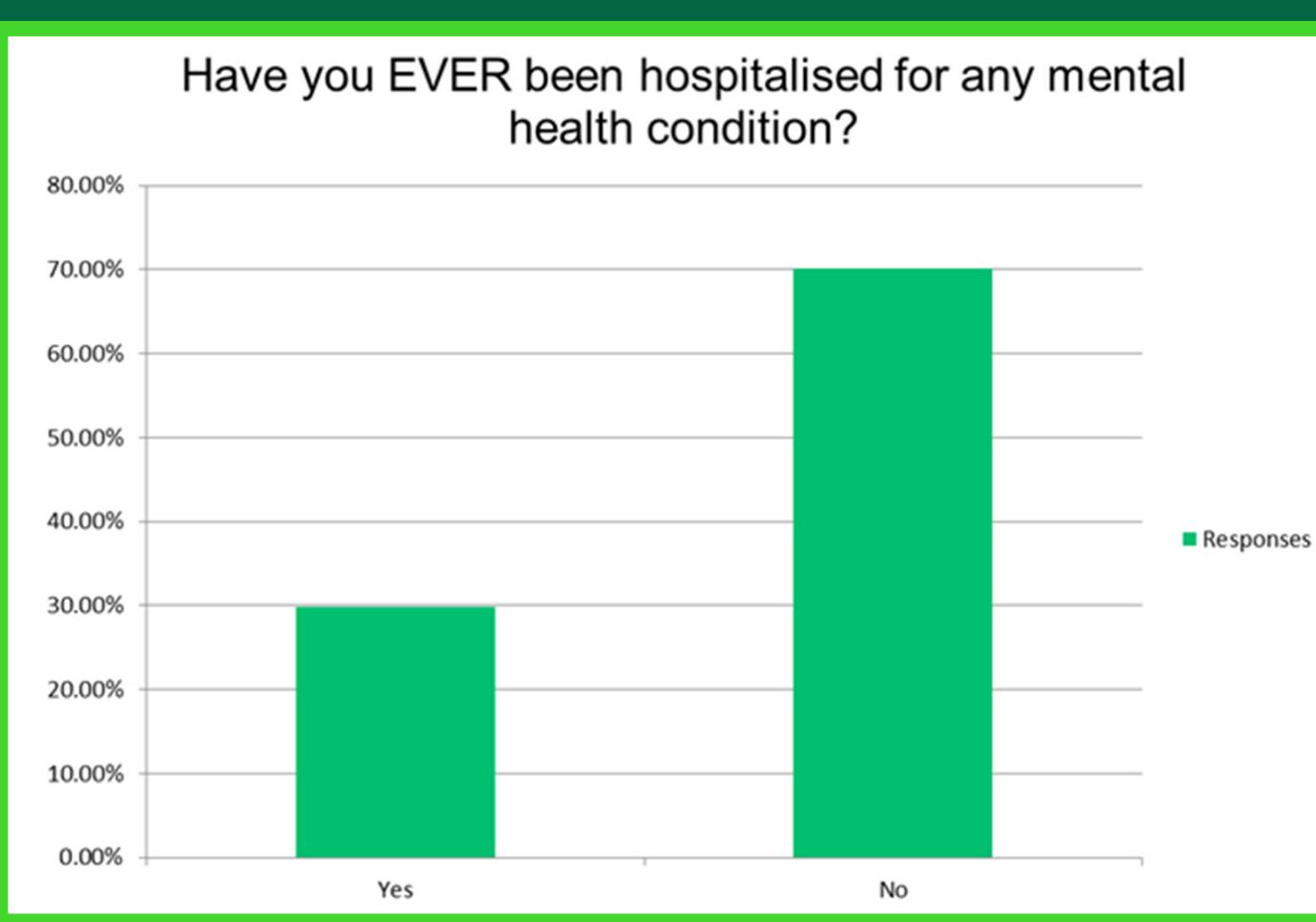
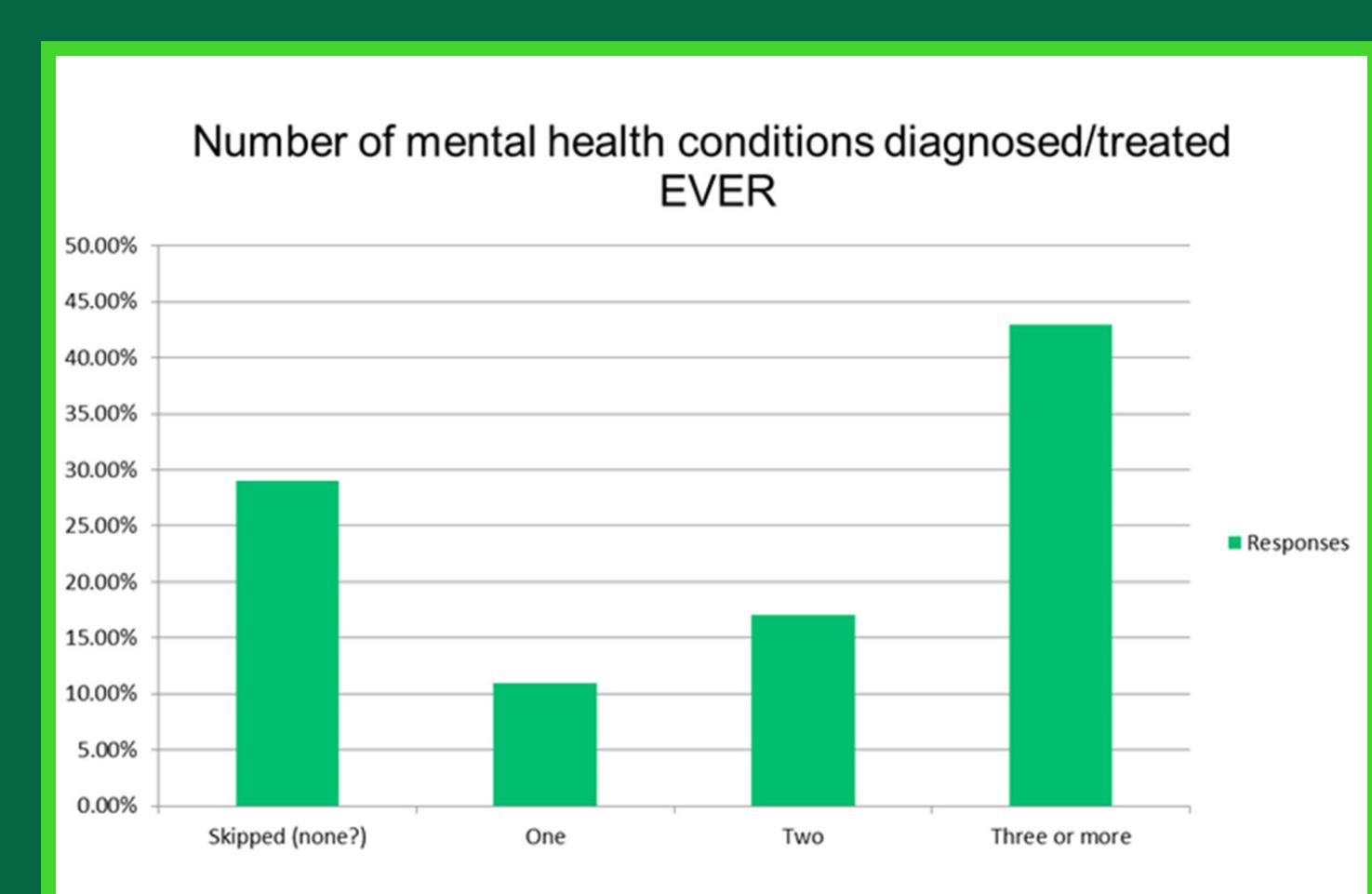
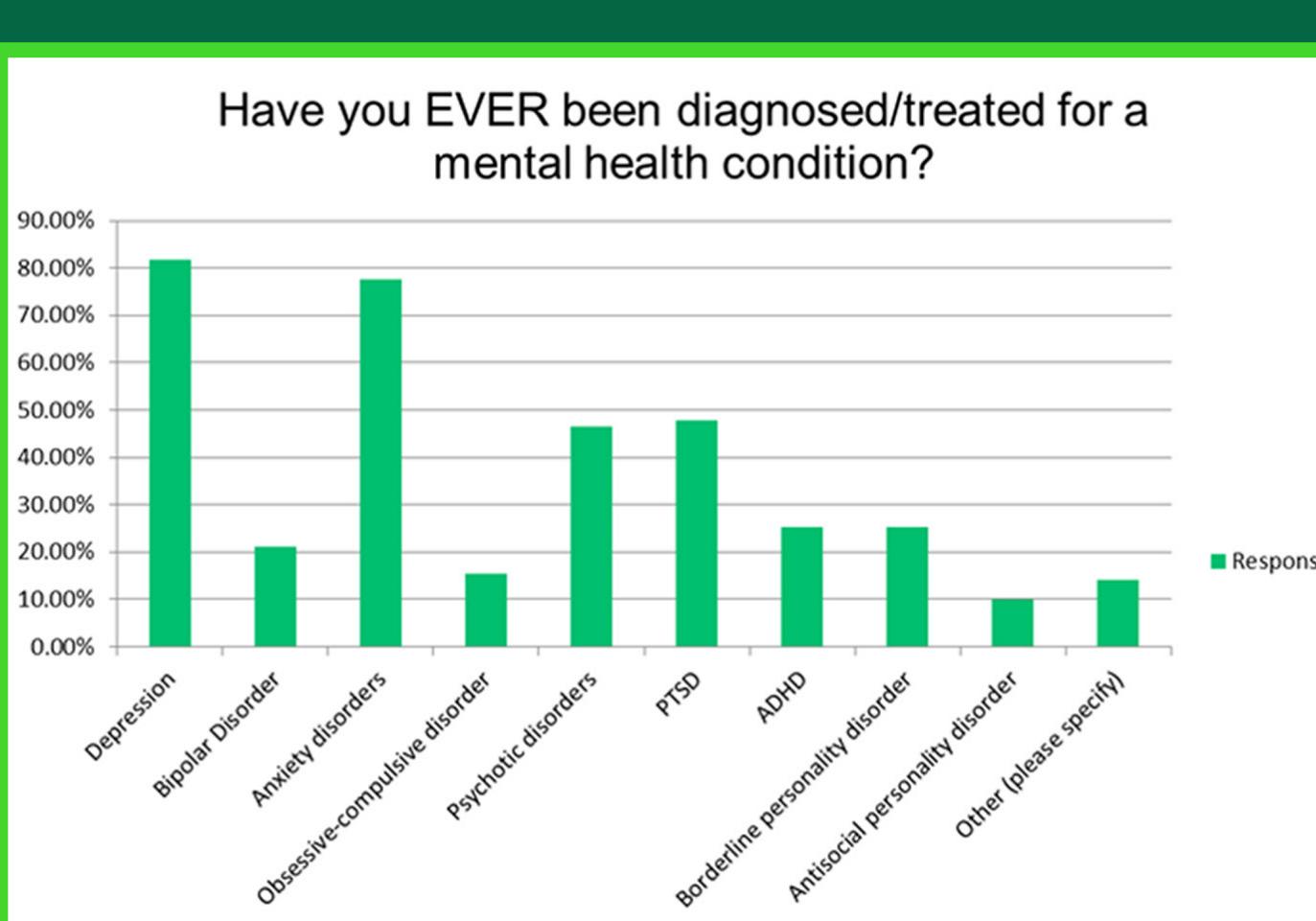
In consultation with staff and consumers, a cross-sectional 8-item survey was developed and implemented in August-September 2022. Clients presenting for any consultation type were asked about past and current mental health conditions and treatment, hospitalisation, satisfaction with treatment and the presence of any undiagnosed or untreated mental health symptoms. The Kessler-5 (K5) Psychological Distress Scale was administered. Participation was voluntary.

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## RESULTS

One hundred clients were surveyed.

- Most (71%) reported one or more mental health conditions ever diagnosed. Of these, depression (82%) and anxiety disorders (77%) were the most common followed by PTSD (48%) and psychotic disorders (46%).
- One-third (31%) reported recent (past 12 months) hospitalisation for a mental health condition.
- 63% of people with at least one mental health condition diagnosed recently were currently receiving treatment.
- Most (74%) receiving treatment for a mental health condition were receiving it from KRC and half (49%) felt it was well or very well managed.
- Thirty-eight percent thought they had undiagnosed mental health symptoms.
- Average K5 score 12.6 (range 5-23).
- 5 to 11 = Low/moderate distress (n=44, 46%)
- 12-25 = High/very high distress (n=52, 54%)
- Responses to an open-ended question, *If there are parts of your mental health care that are working well for you, can you tell us what they are?*, included themes related to counselling, medication (including self-medication) and self-care/coping strategies.



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A clearer picture of the extent of mental health problems and unmet treatment need helps to better target mental health care for this group. While many people with mental health issues were currently being treated, the proportion who self-identified high unmet mental health treatment needs was not insignificant. A challenge of delivering mental health services to vulnerable groups is the need to address multiple complex health conditions and social factors in populations which are largely disengaged from mainstream health services.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Mental health is not a static state. Assessment completed previously may not reflect clients' current mental health and treatment needs. For example, the sudden emergence of COVID-19 and the ensuing physical distancing requirements, withdrawal of social services and restrictions on movement are likely to have impacted on clients' health and wellbeing. Routine assessment of all clients will more accurately determine current mental health and treatment needs and better support wellbeing, but can be challenging if engagement is sporadic. We continue to evolve our capacity to manage mental health diagnoses with our clinical teams.

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