



Australian Government

**Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing**

PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH CARE MINIMUM DATA SET

Kessler-5

11 DECEMBER 2025

Version History

Date	Details
15 September 2016	Initial Version
9 February 2017	Updated Version with scoring amendment
1 September 2018	Updated Version with gender options
11 December 2025	Moved scoring information to https://docs.pmhc-mds.com/phn-po-documentation.html#kessler_5 Changed document name from Scoring the 5 to Kessler-5 (K5) Updated Department of Health to Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Kessler–5 (K-5)

The K-5 measure of psychological distress consists of a subset of five questions taken from the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale-10 (K-10) developed in 1992 by professors Ron Kessler and Dan Mroczek (ABS 2003). The K-10 is a non-specific psychological distress scale that consists of 10 questions designed to measure levels of negative emotional states experienced in the 4 weeks prior to interview (see Appendix A for a list of the K-10 questions).

The NSW Health Survey of 1997 and 1998 utilised the K-10 to measure the psychological distress of more than 35,000 people aged 16 years and over, 600 of whom self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Comparisons of population and sample showed that similar response rates were achieved for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and with agreement from the Ethics Committee of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW, these comparative results were published (NSW Health Department 2000).

In addition to the 10 item question set, the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale also has a 6-question format that is referred to as the Kessler High Distress Measure or, alternatively, the K-6. The K-6 has been used in a number of international studies including the United States National Health Interview Survey (NCHS 2007). In addition, the American Indian Services Utilization, Psychiatric Epidemiology, Risk and Protective Factors Project (AISUPERFPF), which sought to measure the prevalence of mental health problems in American Indians, utilised the K-6 and found that this tool provided a concise and accurate measure of psychological distress within this population (NCAIANMHR 2007).

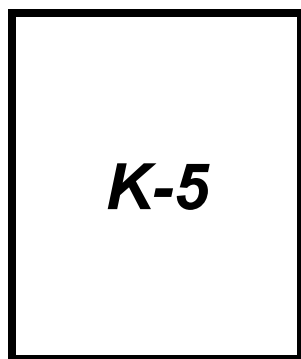
Stakeholders involved in the 2003 social and emotional wellbeing workshop recognised the usefulness of the K-6 in providing a measure of psychological distress, but concerns existed about the cultural appropriateness of the wording of one of the K-6 items. That is, it was felt that the question about the amount of time a person felt 'worthless' might be considered offensive to some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Stewart 2003).

Given that previous research has found that both the K-10 and K-6 are fairly robust measures (for example Furukawa et al. 2003; Kessler et al. 2002) and given that an analysis of 1997–98 NSW Health Survey data suggested that the value of the measure would not be drastically affected by the loss of one item (Stewart 2003), it was agreed that five of the six items from the K-6 would be included in the 2004–05 NATSIHS to provide a measure of psychological distress. Professor Kessler and state and territory health authorities gave their support for the inclusion of these five questions as a means to measure psychological distress among Indigenous Australians.

In addition, slight wording changes were made to two of the original Kessler items to enhance understanding in an Indigenous context: the item which refers to feeling 'hopeless' was changed to one that asked about feeling 'without hope', and the original item that asked about feeling 'restless or fidgety' was modified to one that asked about feeling 'restless or jumpy'.

Reference:

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2009. Measuring the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Cat. no. IHW 24. Canberra: *AIHW*: 5-6.



Patient or Client Identifier:	
<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div>	
Surname:	
<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div>	
Other names:	
<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div>	
Date of Birth:	Gender:
<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div>	Male <input type="checkbox"/> _1 Female <input type="checkbox"/> _2 Other <input type="checkbox"/> _3
Address:	
<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"></div>	

Date completed: __ / __ / ____

Instructions

The following five questions ask about how you have been feeling in the **last four weeks**. For each question, mark the circle under the option that best describes the amount of time you felt that way.

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1. In the last four weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. In the last four weeks, about how often did you feel without hope?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. In the last four weeks, about how often did you feel restless or jumpy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. In the last four weeks, about how often did you feel everything was an effort?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. In the last four weeks, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thankyou for completing this questionnaire.

Please return it to the staff member who asked you to complete it.

K5 scoring

An explanation of how the K5 is scored within the PMHC MDS is available at https://docs.pmhc-mds.com/phn-po-documentation.html#kessler_5