

# Understanding TMS for Depression: A Comprehensive Guide





# Introduction

Depression is a serious and widespread mental health condition that affects millions of people worldwide. According to recent studies in Australia, 15% of Australians aged 16–85 years experience high or very high levels of psychological distress with women and young Australians being the most vulnerable. In total, 2.1 million (9.3%) Australians suffer from some form of depression. Characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating, depression can significantly impact a person's quality of life as well as their income, with studies projecting a loss of AU\$1539 million by 2030 - a 45% increase. While many individuals find relief through traditional treatments such as antidepressant medications and psychotherapy, these methods are not effective for everyone. Some people experience treatment-resistant depression (TRD), where standard treatments do not provide adequate relief.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) has emerged as a promising alternative treatment for depression, offering a non-invasive and painless option for individuals who have not responded to other interventions. This guide provides an in-depth exploration of TMS, its mechanisms, effectiveness, and what to expect from treatment.

## What is TMS?

TMS is a non-invasive procedure that uses electromagnetic pulses to stimulate nerve cells in specific regions of the brain associated with mood regulation. It is primarily used to treat symptoms of depression and major depressive disorder (MDD), particularly in cases where traditional treatments or antidepressants have been ineffective.

## Types of TMS

- Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS): Involves delivering repeated magnetic pulses to targeted areas of the brain. It is the most commonly used form of TMS for depression.
- Deep Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (dTMS): Uses special coils to reach deeper brain structures, potentially benefiting individuals with more severe depression.

## Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (tDCS)

In addition to TMS, Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (tDCS) is another non-invasive brain stimulation technique used in depression treatment. Unlike TMS, which uses magnetic pulses, tDCS delivers a low electrical current to targeted brain regions to modulate neuronal activity. It is a painless procedure and has shown promise in enhancing mood and cognitive function in individuals with depression.



## The Science Behind TMS and Depression Treatment

Understanding how TMS works requires insight into the neurological and chemical processes associated with depression. Depression is not simply a matter of feeling sad—it is linked to measurable changes in brain activity, particularly in regions responsible for mood regulation. TMS provides a targeted way to stimulate these areas, restoring their normal function and offering relief where medications and psychotherapy may not be effective.



## How Depression Affects the Brain

Depression is a complex condition linked to structural and functional changes in the brain. One of the most affected areas is the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making, emotional regulation, and mood stability. In individuals with depression, this region exhibits reduced activity, which contributes to difficulties in processing emotions and regulating negative thoughts. Additionally, the limbic system, which includes structures such as the amygdala and hippocampus, is often hyperactive, leading to heightened stress responses and persistent negative emotions. Neurotransmitter imbalances, particularly lower levels of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, play a crucial role in depressive symptoms, impacting mood, motivation, and cognitive function.

## How TMS Works

TMS targets the underactive prefrontal cortex by delivering precisely calibrated magnetic pulses. These pulses stimulate neuronal activity, helping to re-establish normal brain function and enhance communication between brain regions involved in mood regulation. Over time, this stimulation promotes long-term neuroplasticity, meaning the brain adapts by forming new connections and strengthening existing pathways, which can lead to sustained symptom relief.

## Clinical Evidence

Numerous clinical studies, including research conducted by the Monarch Research Institute, have validated the effectiveness of TMS in treating major depressive disorder, particularly in individuals with treatment-resistant depression (TRD). Findings indicate that 50-60% of patients who have not responded to conventional treatments experience significant improvement with TMS, with around one-third achieving full remission. Monarch's research continues to refine TMS protocols to optimise outcomes, ensuring patients receive the most effective, evidence-based care available.

## Who Can Benefit from TMS?

TMS is recommended for individuals who:

- Have been diagnosed with depression, major depressive disorder (MDD), particularly those with treatment-resistant depression (TRD).
- Have tried at least one antidepressant medication without significant improvement.
- Cannot tolerate the side effects associated with antidepressants, such as weight gain, fatigue, or sexual dysfunction.
- Prefer a non-invasive, medication-free approach to managing depression.
- Are seeking an alternative when psychotherapy alone is insufficient.

TMS may also be beneficial for individuals who experience depression alongside anxiety disorders or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), as some studies suggest it can alleviate symptoms of these conditions as well.

## Who Might Not Be Suitable for TMS?

While TMS is generally safe and well-tolerated, it is not suitable for everyone. Individuals with the following conditions may not be eligible for treatment:

- A history of epilepsy or a high risk of seizures.
- Metal implants or medical devices in the head or neck, such as aneurysm clips, cochlear implants, or deep brain stimulators.
- Severe neurological conditions that could interfere with treatment.
- Unmanaged bipolar disorder or psychotic disorders, unless advised otherwise by a mental health professional.

A thorough assessment by a psychiatrist or healthcare provider is required to determine if TMS is the right option based on an individual's medical history, current symptoms, and treatment goals.

# What to Expect from TMS Treatment

To begin TMS treatment at [Monarch Mental Health Group](https://www.mmhg.com), you will need a completed referral form from your doctor. Our team can assist you with Medicare rebates, private health insurance claims, veteran's assistance, or workers' compensation where appropriate.

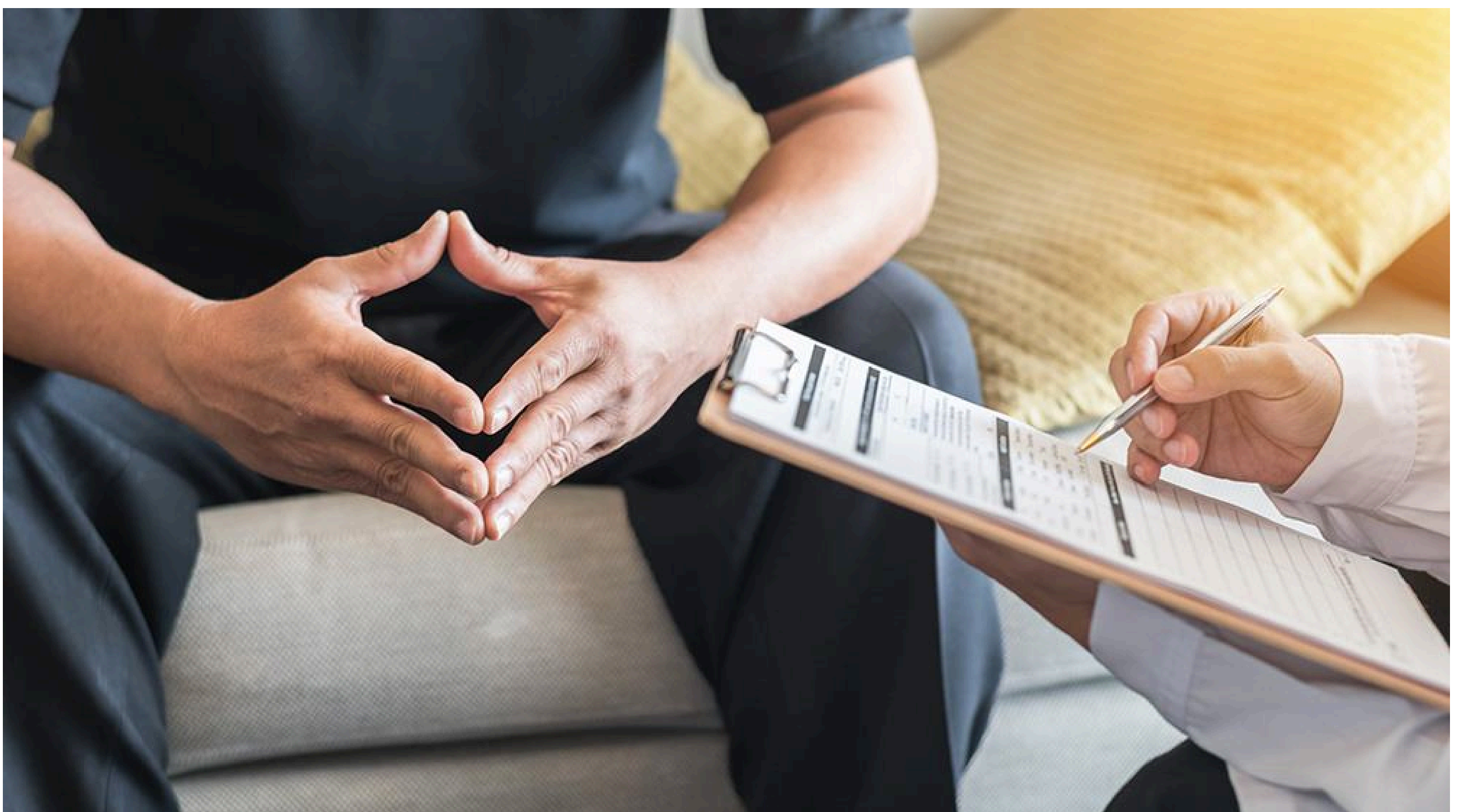
## Initial Consultation

Before beginning TMS, patients undergo a comprehensive evaluation with a psychiatrist. This consultation includes an in-depth review of medical history, current symptoms, and previous treatment approaches to determine whether TMS is a suitable option. The psychiatrist will also discuss potential risks, expected outcomes, and any concerns the patient may have. If deemed appropriate, a personalised treatment plan is created based on the patient's needs.

## The Treatment Process

- **Session Duration and Frequency:** Each TMS session typically lasts between 20 to 40 minutes, and treatments are scheduled five days a week for approximately four to six weeks.
- **During the Session:**
  - The patient is seated comfortably while a specialised TMS coil is positioned over their head to target specific brain areas.
  - Magnetic pulses are delivered to stimulate neural activity in the prefrontal cortex, the region most associated with mood regulation.
  - The patient remains fully conscious, and there is no need for anesthesia or sedation.
  - Many patients use this time to relax, listen to music, or engage in light conversation.
- **Sensations and Potential Discomfort:**
  - Some patients describe a mild tapping sensation on the scalp during treatment, which usually diminishes over time.
  - Headaches or temporary scalp discomfort may occur but can be managed with over-the-counter pain relief if needed.
  - Adjustments to intensity settings can be made to improve comfort during sessions.

Patients can resume normal activities immediately following each session, including driving, working, and social engagements. Throughout the course of treatment, regular follow-ups with the psychiatrist ensure progress is monitored, and adjustments are made as needed to optimise results.





# Effectiveness and Success Rates

TMS has shown promising results as a treatment for major depressive disorder, particularly for those who have not responded to traditional therapies. Understanding its success rates and the factors that influence outcomes can help individuals make informed decisions about pursuing this treatment option.

## Clinical Outcomes

TMS has been extensively studied as a treatment for major depressive disorder, particularly for individuals who have not responded to traditional treatments. Research suggests that 50-60% of patients with treatment-resistant depression (TRD) experience significant symptom improvement, while approximately 30-35% achieve full remission after a standard course of TMS therapy. [Studies conducted at the Monarch Research Institute](#) have further refined treatment protocols to improve response rates and better identify individuals who are most likely to benefit from TMS.

One meta-analysis published in [JAMA Psychiatry](#) found that repetitive TMS (rTMS) had a response rate of 58% and a remission rate of 37% among individuals with TRD. Moreover, long-term follow-up studies have shown that many patients continue to experience benefits months after treatment, with some requiring maintenance sessions to sustain improvements.

## Factors Affecting Outcomes

Several factors can influence the effectiveness of TMS treatment, including:

- **Severity and duration of depression:** Patients with long-term, severe depression may require more sessions or combined therapy approaches.
- **Neurobiological differences:** Individual variations in brain chemistry and neural plasticity can affect response rates.
- **Adherence to treatment schedule:** Completing the full course of TMS sessions—typically 20-30 treatments over four to six weeks—is crucial for achieving optimal results.
- **Combination with other therapies:** Some patients respond better when TMS is combined with psychotherapy, psychiatric care, or medication-assisted psychotherapy, all of which are available at Monarch Mental Health Group.

## Patient Testimonials

Many individuals who have undergone TMS report substantial improvements in mood, energy levels, and overall quality of life. Testimonials from Monarch patients highlight experiences of renewed motivation, increased ability to engage in daily activities, and a significant reduction in depressive symptoms. However, as with any treatment, results vary from person to person. Some individuals may experience a gradual onset of benefits, while others see more immediate effects. For those who require continued symptom management, maintenance TMS sessions may be recommended at periodic intervals.

Overall, research and real-world applications indicate that TMS is a highly effective, evidence-based treatment that provides meaningful relief for individuals with depression, especially those with limited success using traditional therapies.

# TMS vs. Other Depression Treatments

Finding the right treatment for depression can be challenging, as individuals respond differently to various therapies. While medications and psychotherapy are common first-line treatments, they are not always effective for everyone. TMS provides an alternative for those who have not found relief through traditional methods.

Below is a comparison of TMS with other established depression treatments to help patients make informed decisions.



## TMS vs. Antidepressant Medications

Antidepressant medications are a common first-line treatment for depression, targeting neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. However, they can take weeks to become effective, and many individuals experience unwanted side effects, including weight gain, fatigue, nausea, and sexual dysfunction. Some patients also develop tolerance or find medications ineffective for treatment-resistant depression (TRD).

### Pros of TMS:

- Non-invasive and does not require daily medication intake.
- Fewer systemic side effects compared to antidepressants.
- Effective for individuals with TRD.

### Cons of TMS:

- Requires multiple in-clinic sessions over several weeks.
- May not be effective for everyone.

## TMS vs. Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and other therapeutic approaches, is highly effective for mild to moderate depression. However, severe depression or TRD may not respond adequately to talk therapy alone, making additional treatments necessary.

### When to Consider TMS Over Psychotherapy:

- If psychotherapy alone has not led to significant improvements.
- If medication is not an option due to side effects or lack of effectiveness.
- If a non-invasive alternative is preferred.

## TMS vs. Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is another treatment for severe depression, particularly in cases of suicidal ideation or psychotic depression. While highly effective, ECT requires anesthesia and can lead to memory loss and cognitive impairment.

### TMS Benefits Compared to ECT:

- Non-invasive with no need for anesthesia.
- No memory loss or cognitive side effects.
- Minimal recovery time, allowing patients to continue daily activities.

## Combined Therapies at Monarch Mental Health Group

At Monarch Mental Health Group, we recognise that depression treatment is not one-size-fits-all. Where appropriate, we provide combined therapies alongside TMS, including:

- **Psychology and Psychiatry Services:** To address underlying mental health concerns and provide therapeutic support.
- **Next Step Medication:** A comprehensive medication review and optimisation for patients who may benefit from adjusted prescriptions.
- **Medication-Assisted Psychotherapy:** Combining psychotherapy with carefully managed medication to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

By offering integrated treatment options, Monarch Mental Health Group ensures a holistic approach to depression care, improving patient outcomes through personalised and evidence-based strategies.



# Cost and Accessibility of TMS

Accessing effective treatment for depression should not be held back by financial barriers. While TMS is a valuable treatment option, understanding the associated costs and available funding options is essential for patients considering this therapy. Monarch Mental Health Group is dedicated to making TMS more accessible by assisting patients with financial support options, including Medicare rebates, private health insurance, veterans' benefits, and workplace compensation schemes.

## Cost Considerations

The cost of TMS treatment varies depending on location, provider, and individual treatment plans. A full course of TMS, which typically involves 20-30 sessions over several weeks, can range from several thousand dollars. While this may seem like a significant investment, various financial assistance options and payment plans are available to make treatment more accessible. Monarch Mental Health Group is committed to helping patients navigate their options to ensure affordability where possible.

## Medicare and Private Health Insurance

In Australia, Medicare provides coverage for TMS treatment for eligible patients who meet specific criteria. This can significantly reduce out-of-pocket expenses for those who qualify. Additionally, some private health insurance providers offer partial reimbursements for TMS therapy. Patients are encouraged to check with their insurance providers to determine the extent of their coverage. Our team at Monarch Mental Health Group can assist in providing the necessary documentation to support insurance claims.

## Veterans' Benefits and Workplace Compensation

Veterans experiencing depression and mental health concerns may be eligible for Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) benefits to cover the cost of TMS treatment. Those who have experienced work-related mental health conditions may also qualify for workers' compensation schemes, which can contribute to the cost of treatment. Monarch Mental Health Group can provide guidance on how to access these benefits and assist in submitting the required paperwork.

## Finding a TMS Provider

TMS treatment is available at specialised mental health clinics, including Monarch Mental Health Group, which offers expert-led, patient-focused TMS therapy. [Our clinics](#) in NSW, Queensland and Victoria provide a comprehensive approach, incorporating psychology, psychiatry, and medication-assisted psychotherapy where necessary to enhance treatment outcomes. [Our experienced team](#) is dedicated to ensuring that patients receive the highest quality care, tailored to their unique needs.



## Next Steps

TMS has emerged as a highly effective option for individuals struggling with treatment-resistant depression. It provides a non-invasive, medication-free alternative for those who have not found relief through traditional methods. While results vary, many patients experience significant improvements, making it a worthwhile consideration for those seeking a new approach to managing depression.

### Here's what to do

- Speak with a mental health professional to determine if TMS is right for you.
- Research reputable providers in your area.
- Stay informed about available financial support options.

For those ready to take the next step, Monarch Mental Health Group provides expert-led TMS treatment with a focus on patient outcomes and personalised care at our mental health clinics across Australia. [Contact us today](#) to schedule a consultation and explore whether TMS is the right choice for you.