




# Unequally Unwell: Shorter life expectancies, reduced life opportunities

*A summary: Mortality of people using Australian Government funded mental health treatments – Analysis of 2016 Census, death registry, MBS and PBS data report.*



This fact sheet presents key findings from a report analysing the mortality rates of people using Australian Government-funded mental health services and prescription medications. The report is published by Equally Well Australia, a project supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

The data in the report represents people who accessed mental health-related services covered by Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and/or Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) between August 2016 and September 2017. Data from the 2016 Australian Census, death registry, MBS, and PBS were linked for this analysis.

This report covering 24 million Australians, showed that over 5 million people accessed mental health-related treatments during this period.

The report highlights the significantly higher mortality rates and potentially preventable deaths among people accessing Australian Government-funded mental health services.

It underscores the urgent need for targeted solutions, especially for younger age groups and those in disadvantaged areas, to improve health outcomes and reduce premature mortality of people living with mental illness.

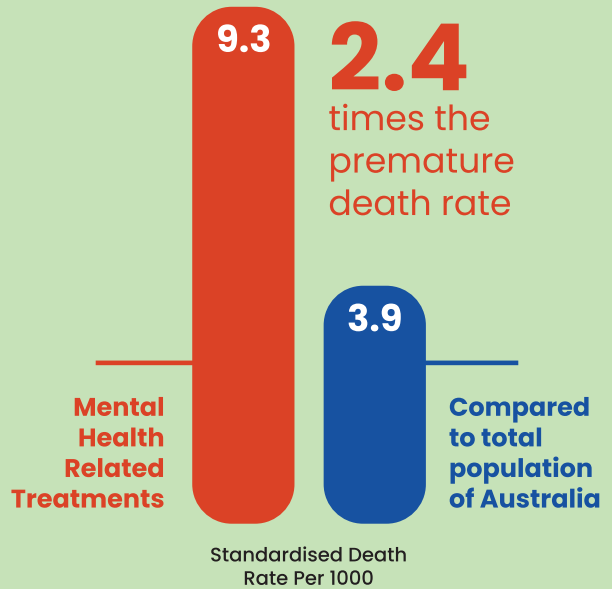
## Snapshot & Key Findings

Data and key findings from the report analysing the mortality rates of people using Australian Government-funded mental health services.



# Snapshot

## People who accessed mental health-related treatments

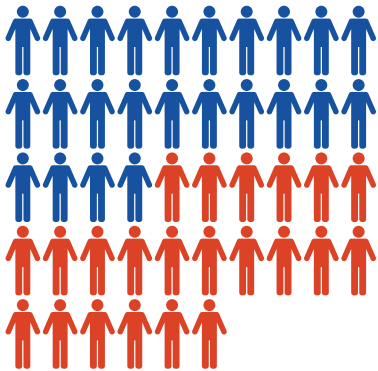


**11**  
YEARS

On average, **reduced life expectancy** of 11 years.

### TODAY

**46** potentially preventable deaths

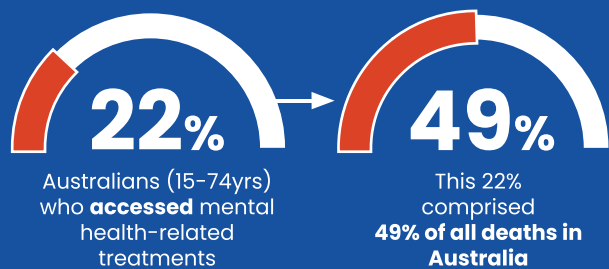


**24** potentially preventable cancer-caused deaths

For every **1,000** males who accessed **mental health services**: **14** DIED

For every **1,000** females who accessed **mental health services**: **7** DIED

For every **1,000** people in the **total population**: **4** DIED



# Key Findings



**Three in five deaths** of people who accessed mental health-related treatments were potentially **preventable** if they had received equitable access to social support, and the same quality of health care as the rest of the population.



Potentially preventable deaths of people who accessed mental health-related treatments represented **28% of all deaths of Australians aged 15-74 years**.



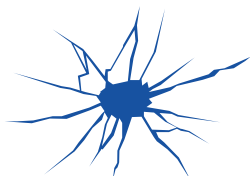
**64% of all cancer deaths** were of people who accessed mental health related treatments. There were more potentially **preventable cancer** deaths of people who accessed mental health-related treatments than total deaths for the rest of the Australian population.



The breast cancer death rate for people who accessed mental health-related treatments were **6 times that of the rest of the population**. There were on average 12 potentially **preventable** breast cancer deaths every week for people who accessed mental health-related treatments.



The standardised death rates for **colon cancer and prostate cancer** for people who accessed mental health-related treatments were **4 and 5 times** higher respectively than that in the rest of the population.



**Transport accidents and intentional self-harm** combined, **comprised less than 5%** of all premature deaths of people who accessed mental health-related treatments.

# About Equally Well

Equally Well is a collective of over 100 organisations committed to the physical health of people living with mental illness. Under the priority actions identified in the Equally Well National Consensus Statement 2017, members agree to shared goals: promote awareness, facilitate collaboration in the health sector and measure progress. The Equally Well initiative is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. This report is a priority action from the 2021–2024 funding.

## Defining the cohort of people accessing mental health-related treatments

For this type of analysis, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) defines mental health treatment as receiving a Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) service via a specific mental health-related item number and/or a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) prescription for one or more medication types

usually used to treat a mental health condition (hereafter referred to as mental health-related treatments). This list can be viewed in the full report. This does not necessarily equate to a diagnosis of a mental health condition. The data does not include other mental health-related services that are not directly funded by the Australian Government. Importantly, the analysis **does not imply a causal relationship** between the use of mental health-related treatments and premature mortality (indeed, the **research evidence indicates the opposite**).

**For full detailed data and references refer to the full Mortality of people using Australian Government-funded mental health services and prescription medications – Analysis of 2016 Census, death registry, MBS and PBS data report which can be found on the Equally Well website [www.equallywell.org.au](http://www.equallywell.org.au)**



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### Access the Report

Full Report



Summary



Data Files



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