



This factsheet is part of a series on specific health risks for people living with mental health conditions. It draws on Equally Well's national monitoring report, [Unequally Unwell](#). There is an 11-year life expectancy gap for people living with mental illness – two-thirds of these deaths are potentially preventable.<sup>1</sup>

## Blood and lymph cancers

Blood and lymph cancers (including leukemia, lymphoma, and myeloma) disrupt normal blood cell production and immune function.<sup>2,3</sup>

With appropriate screening and treatment, the 5-year survival rates range from 55% for myeloma, 65% for leukaemia, and 75% for lymphoma.<sup>4</sup>

**People with mental illness are 3 times more likely to die of blood and lymph cancer than the general population.<sup>1</sup>**

In Australia:

- Blood and lymph cancers accounted for 1,865 deaths among people accessing mental health-related treatments.<sup>1</sup>
- Almost half of these deaths were 'excess'.



## People with mental illness are less likely to be screened for blood and lymph cancers.

People with severe mental illness are **2.1 times more likely to die** from cancer before age 75, but their cancer screening rates remain low.<sup>6</sup>

Cancer diagnosis therefore happens at a more advanced stage, which negatively impacts survival rates.<sup>5</sup>

Common barriers to screening and diagnosis include:



Stigmatising attitudes and poor communication



Accessibility problems such as affordability of care and access issues.<sup>7</sup>

Help and support from healthcare providers, friends, and family facilitates access.<sup>7</sup>

## These cancers have a further negative impact on mental health:

- People who have mental health issues prior to cancer diagnosis have 2-3 times higher chances of mental health difficulties after diagnosis,<sup>8</sup> which further reduces likelihood of survival.<sup>9</sup>

## Together, we can make a difference.

There are lots of ways we can work together for equity in cancer screening and treatment for people living with mental health conditions.

### Look after yourself

- **Ask** your doctor for a routine health check or ask a health professional or someone close to you for support with arranging or attending appointments.
- **Empower** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.
- **Discover** ways to improve your health and wellbeing through by exploring Equally Well's [resources](#).

### How to help others

- **Ask** about their health and if they need support to arrange a health check-up.
- **Advise** about regular health checks and screens, and opportunities for improving health and wellbeing.
- **Assist** with overcoming barriers and implementing strategies to help them maintain good health.
- **Share** this fact sheet widely to improve awareness in libraries, health services, with your friends and colleagues.

### Activate your workplace

- **Equip** your service by establishing cancer screening resources and referral tools for your service.
- **Coordinate** care by establishing partnerships between mental health services and primary care providers to facilitate screening and follow-up care.

Everyone can play a role to advocate for health care equity. Access to quality physical health care is a basic human right for everyone– keep asking until you and the people you support get the care you deserve.

**Every day in Australia 46 people with mental illness die of preventable health conditions.**

If we share the responsibility, we can ensure that one of these 46 is not someone we know and care for.

“Do what you can,  
where you can,  
when you can.”

#### More information

The Unequally Unwell report examined the premature mortality and preventable deaths\* for people living with mental health conditions.

\*Preventable deaths are defined as the number of deaths in a section of the population above that expected, based on the total population death rates. (OECD. "Excess mortality", in Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021).

#### Links *[click or scan]*



[Unequally Unwell Summary Report](#)



[Full Report](#)



[Full list of references](#)

#### About Equally Well

Equally Well is a collective of over 100 organisations committed to the physical health of people living with mental illness. The Equally Well initiative is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.



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