



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](#), and other relevant research. There is an 11-year life expectancy gap for people living with mental health conditions – two-thirds of these deaths are potentially **preventable**.¹

The health inequity

People with mental health conditions are 6 times more likely to die prematurely from breast cancer.¹

For people with mental health conditions, breast cancer causes:

- Over 970 premature deaths^a per year.¹
- And over 600 (12 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



People with mental health conditions are:

- 22% less likely to complete mammograms²
- 22%-30% less likely to receive guideline-recommended treatment after diagnosis.^{3,4}

Breast cancer screening saves lives^b

Women over 40 years can have a free [mammogram](#) every 2 years, and women aged 50 to 74 are strongly encouraged to screen regularly.⁵

Initial testing for breast cancer involves a mammogram. Treatment is very effective if detected early, and 5-year survival rates are 92.7%.⁶

There are ways we can work together to promote health for people living with mental health conditions.

Looking after yourself

- **Be breast-aware:** Regularly take time to look and feel your breasts to learn what is normal for you.⁸
- **Be aware of changes:** Pay attention to changes like a new lump, swelling, skin texture changes, or nipple changes.
- **Report changes** to your doctor: If you notice anything unusual, see your doctor without delay. Early detection significantly improves outcome.
- **Ask** your GP about screening options if you are over 40 years old, or have a family history of breast cancer (up-to-date information on the [Cancer Australia website](#)⁸).
- **Reach out** for support from [McGrath Cancer Care Nurses](#).⁹
- **Equip** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) and [iPrevent tool](#)¹⁰ to plan the physical health care you want.
- **Access** support networks from [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#).¹¹

How to help others

- **Ask** friends or family about their health, and when they last saw their GP.
- **Advise** about breast cancer screening options available.
- **Assist** by supporting them to arrange and attend GP appointments.
- **Share** this factsheet in places such as your workplace, health services, libraries, community spaces and with friends and colleagues.

Activate your workplace

- **Promote** staff awareness of higher breast cancer risks for people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for women over 40 years old.
- **Equip** your service with resources available from the [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#).¹¹
- **Seek** to coordinate mental and general healthcare.

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 they deserve.

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

Every day in Australia, **46 people** with mental health conditions **die of preventable** physical health conditions. Your actions will reduce the number of preventable deaths.

About breast cancer^a

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women. Breast cancer can develop at any age, but is more likely as you get older.

Age and genetic factors such as family history are the main risks for breast cancer, as well as lifestyle factors such as physical inactivity, alcohol intake, smoking and poor diet.⁷

More information is available from [Cancer Australia](#),⁸ the [National Breast Cancer Foundation](#),⁷ [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#),¹¹ and the [McGrath Foundation](#).¹²

Further information

The Unequally Unwell report¹ examined the premature mortality and preventable deaths for people living with mental health conditions, defined as the number of deaths in a section of the population above that expected based on the total population death rates (as defined by OECD¹³).

Links *[click or scan]*



[Unequally Unwell Summary Report](#)



[Full Report](#)



[Equally Well](#)

About Equally Well

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

^a Premature is defined as between the age of 15 to 74 years.

^b Please note, this information is not a substitute for professional medical advice. For the most up-to-date information, visit the Cancer Australia website.⁸



Factsheet #8

Breast cancer and mental health

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