



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.¹

Blood and lymph cancers

Blood and lymph cancers (including leukemia, lymphoma, and myeloma) disrupt normal blood cell production and immune function.^{2, 3}

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

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

In Australia:

- Blood and lymph cancers accounted for 1,865 deaths among people accessing mental health-related treatments.¹
- 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.⁶

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

Common barriers to screening and diagnosis include:



Stigmatising attitudes and poor communication



Accessibility problems such as affordability of care and access issues.⁷

Help and support from healthcare providers, friends, and family facilitates access.⁷

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,⁸ which further reduces likelihood of survival.⁹

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 conditions¹.

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).

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About Equally Well

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Influenza and pneumonia

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a contagious virus that affects the nose, throat and lungs. Influenza is more serious than the common cold, and can lead to secondary lung infections such as pneumonia. Vaccination can prevent the flu, and associated complications.²

Influenza and pneumonia disproportionately affect people accessing mental healthcare.

In Australia, people accessing mental health-related treatments are 3 times more likely to be hospitalised, and have 7 times the average hospital bed days due to vaccine-preventable flu and pneumonia compared with the rest of the population.³

This results in:

- 2,016 deaths per year¹, of which
- 1,242 deaths (more than half) are 'excess', or potentially preventable¹.

People with mental health conditions are **3 to 5 times more likely to die** from influenza and pneumonia.^{1,4}

Vaccination saves lives by:

- Protecting the health of people living with mental health conditions.
- Limiting the spread of flu to family, friends and the community.
- Helping prevent illness, hospitalisation and death.
- Taking pressure off our already overstretched hospital and health services.

People with mental health conditions are less likely to access influenza vaccinations.



21%

People experiencing frequent mental distress have 21% lower vaccination rates than those without distress.⁷



People with severe mental illness have about half the vaccine coverage of the general population.^{8,9}

Vaccine Equity and 'Right to Health'

The World Health Organisation reinforced that "immunisation is, and should be recognised as a core component of the human right to health".^{5, 6}

There are lots of ways we can work together for equity in vaccination access for people living with mental health conditions.

Look after yourself

- **Ask** your doctor and healthcare professional about vaccinations you can access, and if necessary, for help with arranging or attending appointments.
- **Equip** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) on the Equally Well website to plan the physical health care you want.

How to help others

- **Ask** when they last had their vaccinations.
- **Advise** about the benefit of preventing viruses and possibility of spreading it to others.
- **Assist** by providing support to find information, and attend appointments.
- **Share** this fact sheet widely to improve awareness in libraries, health services, and with your friends and colleagues.

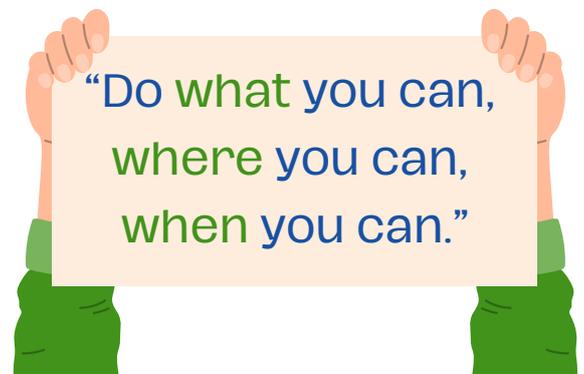
Activate your workplace

- **Equip** your service by promoting vaccination information resources.
- **Embed** preventative care into usual practice and implement reminder systems to prompt staff to discuss vaccinations with consumers.
- **Coordinate** care with local community pharmacies and primary care clinics.
- **Arrange** provision of vaccinations directly at mental health facilities or establish mobile vaccination services in residential facilities.

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.¹

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



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 excess or potentially preventable deaths in a section of the population above that expected based on the total population death rates.¹²

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Lung cancer is the **most common** cause of premature* death in people living with mental illness.¹

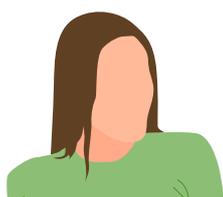
About lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases

Lung and respiratory conditions, such as lung cancer, asthma and bronchitis, are characterised by symptoms like breathlessness, wheezing, and chronic cough.

Anyone can get lung and respiratory diseases, and they are the second leading cause of death in Australia.²

For people living with mental health conditions,

- lung cancer causes over 2,000 premature deaths per year,¹ and
- over 1,300 of these deaths are **potentially preventable**.⁹



Every week there are 25 potentially preventable deaths from lung cancer, and 18 potentially preventable deaths due to respiratory disease.¹

People with mental health conditions are:

- 4x** more likely to die prematurely from lung cancer¹
- 5x** more likely to die prematurely from respiratory diseases¹
- 5x** more likely to be hospitalised due to respiratory conditions³
- 6x** the average hospital bed days due to respiratory conditions.³

If detected early, the survival rates for lung cancer are as high as 68%.⁴

Smoking cessation saves lives

Smoking kills 1 in 2 long-term smokers.⁵

The risk of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases is 15-30 times higher in people who smoke.⁶

Smoking cessation support can help people with mental health conditions reduce or quit smoking,⁷ particularly if face-to-face support and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) options are offered.⁸

Stop smoking. Start living.

*'Premature' referring to under the age of 75 years.

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

Look after yourself

- **Ask** about *lung cancer screening* and *smoking cessation support*.
- **Access** free lung cancer screening and respiratory function tests, and smoking cessation services such as the [My QuitBuddy](#) app or Quitline (13 78 48).
- **Explore** community opportunities to become more *physically active* to improve lung health, and if necessary, ask for support to attend.
- **Equip** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.

How to help others

- **Ask** about their lung health, and if they smoke, ask if they have thought about quitting.
- **Advise** about the [lung health](#) support options available and the benefit of smoking cessation.
- **Assist** by providing support to attend appointments for lung and respiratory assessments, and smoking cessation support.
- **Share** this factsheet widely in your workplace, health services, libraries, community spaces and with your friends and colleagues.



Activate your workplace

- **Promote** staff awareness of lung health risks and the early warning signs.
- **Equip** your service by promoting [respiratory health and screening resources](#).
- **Encourage** proactive screening and treatment.
- **Advocate** to ensure equity of access to smoking cessation supports such as Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRT) or quit lines for people with mental health conditions.
- **Coordinate** mental and respiratory healthcare and implement smoking cessation programs tailored for people with mental health challenges.

Every day in Australia, 46 people with mental illness die of preventable health conditions¹.

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 OECD⁸).

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About bowel cancer

Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal, colon, or rectal cancer, develops from the inner lining of the bowel.² Incidence of colon cancer is increasing in Australia, especially in people under 50 years old.³

The health inequity

In people living with mental health conditions, bowel cancers cause:

- over 900 premature^a deaths per year¹, and
- more than 500 of these deaths are 'potentially preventable'.¹



People with mental health conditions are:

4x

more likely to die prematurely from bowel cancer¹

7x

more likely to die prematurely from bowel cancer if under 55 years old.¹

Bowel cancer screening saves lives

[Screening](#) involves a simple at-home test for people who do not have obvious symptoms of disease, and may detect early signs.

Delaying screening and follow-up tests may result in cancer being diagnosed at later stages, leading to lower survival rates.



People aged 50-74 are automatically sent a bowel screening test. If aged over 45 years, you can also [request a kit online](#).

However, people with a mental illness are significantly *less likely* to:

- complete a bowel screening test^{4,5}
- complete the test correctly^{4,5}
- receive a follow-up colonoscopy after a positive test result.^{4,5}

^aFor ages 15-75 years; these figures are doubled when considering all ages.

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

Look after yourself

- **Order** a bowel screening test kit
 - from your GP or health professional
 - [request a screening kit online](#)
 - or call 1800 627 701.
- **Familiarise** yourself with the [common symptoms and early warning signs](#).
- **Ask** your relatives about any family history of bowel cancer.
- **Explore** opportunities to be more physically active, eat healthy, and reduce alcohol and smoking.
- **Equip** yourself with the Equally Well [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical healthcare you want.

How to help others

- **Ask** if they have completed, and returned their bowel cancer screening test.
- **Advise** about the bowel screening support options available, and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.
- **Assist** with ordering a screening kit, and support them to schedule and attend GP appointments.
- **Share** this factsheet widely.

Activate your workplace

- **Promote** staff awareness of increased risk of bowel cancer for people with mental illness.
- **Bulk order** testing kits to give out at appointments as needed.
- **Encourage** proactive screening and treatment.
- **Implement** targeted healthy lifestyle programs tailored for people with mental health challenges.

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

Every day in Australia 46 people with mental illness die of preventable health conditions¹.

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.”

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 OECD⁷).

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There is an 11-year life expectancy gap for people living with mental illness – two-thirds of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹

About diabetes

Diabetes is characterised by high blood sugar. This occurs when the body either does not produce insulin, produces insufficient insulin, or cannot use insulin effectively. High blood sugar can lead to serious long-term health complications.²

The health inequity

In people with mental health challenges, diabetes causes:

- over 680 premature^a deaths per year¹
- over 380 (7 per week) of these deaths are 'potentially preventable'.¹

Every single day in Australia, there is one preventable death from diabetes of a person with mental health challenges.

People with mental health conditions are:

- 2-3 times more likely to have diabetes^{3,4}
- 4 times more likely to die prematurely from diabetes¹
- 6 times more likely to die prematurely from diabetes if under 55 years old¹
- 5 times more likely to be hospitalised due to diabetes complications⁵
- 6 times the average hospital bed days due to diabetes complications.⁵

Screening and support can save lives

A fasting blood glucose (blood sugar) test can diagnose diabetes or detect if someone is pre-diabetic (at risk of developing diabetes).

A doctor (GP or psychiatrist) can order blood tests to screen for diabetes.

Delaying screening may result in diabetes going untreated, leading to other health problems.

Early action can prevent or delay diabetes, reduce the impact of diabetes, and improve quality of life and longevity,² including:



regular physical activity (150 min/week of moderate to vigorous activity)⁶



healthy eating (high in vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low in sugar, carbs and saturated fats)⁷



sleep and stress management (8 hours of quality sleep; mindfulness practice)



reducing or quitting smoking and alcohol.

^aPremature refers to ages 15-75 years.

Disclaimer: This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice.

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

Look after yourself

- **Know** your [risk factors](#).
- **Check** for warning signs of diabetes such as increased hunger or thirst, frequent urination, fatigue, blurred vision, slow-healing wounds, tingling or numbness in the hands or feet, unexplained weight loss.
- **Ask** about diabetes screening when you talk with your health professional.
- **Explore** [free diabetes prevention programs](#) that promote physical activity, healthy eating, improving sleep, and reducing alcohol and smoking.
- **Equip** yourself with the Equally Well [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.

How to help others

- **Ask** about their health, including when they last saw their GP, how they take care of their health, and if they have been tested recently.
- **Advise** about the support and screening options available.
- **Assist** by providing support to arrange and attend appointments with their GP, specialists, or support programs and community activities.

Activate your workplace

- **Promote** staff awareness of diabetes risks and early warning signs.
- **Equip** your service by making it easy to access diabetes screening.
- **Encourage** proactive screening and treatment.
- **Implement** targeted healthy lifestyle programs tailored for people with mental health challenges.

Together we will make a difference

Access to quality physical healthcare is a fundamental human right, which is too frequently denied to people living with mental health conditions. Keep asking and advocating until you, and the people you support get the care deserved.

Every day in Australia 46 people with mental illness die of preventable health conditions¹.

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.”

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 OECD⁹).

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About stroke

A stroke can be caused by a blocked or ruptured artery that prevents blood from reaching the brain. High blood pressure is the most significant risk factor for stroke.²

Cerebrovascular diseases are a broader category of conditions affecting blood flow to the brain, for which stroke accounts for the majority of deaths.¹

The health inequity

People with mental health conditions, are at much greater risk of dying from stroke.

In Australia, cerebrovascular diseases cause:

- over 550 premature deaths^b per year¹
- over 200 (4 per week) of these deaths are 'potentially preventable'.¹

People with mental health conditions are:

- 2 times more likely to die prematurely from cerebrovascular diseases¹
- more than 2 times more likely to report having had a stroke³
- almost 3 times more likely to be hospitalised for high blood pressure
- have 3 times the average hospital bed days⁴
- likely to experience shorter times between further stroke events.⁵

Support healthy living – help save lives

Risk factors include:

- High blood pressure
- Excess weight
- High cholesterol
- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Diabetes

Protective factors include:

- Regular physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Limiting alcohol
- Smoking cessation
- Managing health conditions (such as diabetes)
- Regular health checks

Screening for these risks helps start the conversation about supporting protective factors.

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

Look after yourself

- **Ask** your GP to check your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels regularly.
- **Be 'brain-healthy'** by getting physically active, eating a balanced diet high in fruit and vegetables, reducing alcohol and smoking.

- Connect with online communities related to stroke support.
- Equip yourself with our [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.

How to help others

- **Know** the warning signs: Learn the signs of stroke using the FAST test:
 - Face: Is one side drooping?
 - Arms: Can they lift both arms?
 - Speech: Is their speech slurred or confused?
 - Time: Call 000 immediately if you see any of these signs.
- **Ask** friends or family when they last had a health check and if they know the [signs of stroke](#).
- **Advise** about stroke prevention, including the importance of managing blood pressure and living a healthy lifestyle.
- **Assist** by providing support to arrange to visit a GP.
- **Share** this fact sheet widely.

Activate your workplace

- **Promote** [stroke awareness](#) by educating staff about stroke warning signs and the importance of early response.
- **Encourage** screening for stroke risk factors.
- **Equip** your service [by providing resources](#) about healthy living and stroke risk reduction.
- **Implement** tailored healthy lifestyle programs to reduce risk of stroke
- **Seek** to coordinate mental and general healthcare.

^aNote this information is not a substitute for professional medical advice. For the most up-to-date information, visit the Stroke Foundation website.²

^bUnder the age of 75 years.

Together we will make a difference

Access to quality physical healthcare is a fundamental human right, which is too frequently denied to people living with mental health conditions. Keep asking and advocating until you, and the people you support get the care deserved.

Every day in Australia 46 people with mental illness die of preventable physical health conditions.¹

Your actions will reduce the number of preventable deaths.

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

Further information

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Factsheet #1

Blood and lymph cancers

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Factsheet #6

Stroke and mental health

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