



On average, people living with mental health conditions **die 11 years earlier than the rest of the population.**

Two-thirds of these deaths are **preventable**¹ by accessing freely available services.

We can change this!

The health inequity

People with mental health conditions are **24 times more likely to die prematurely** from dementia.¹ This heightened risk is greatest for people aged under 75 years.

For people with mental health conditions, dementia causes:

- Over 380 premature deaths^a per year¹
- and over 290 (6 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



Mental illness symptoms in mid-late life may 'mask' dementia onset, causing delays in diagnosis and treatment.²

Support healthy living, help save lives^b

Up to 45% of dementia may be preventable.³ Screening for risk factors helps start the conversation about supporting protective factors.⁴

Risk factors for dementia include high blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, alcohol consumption, and smoking, as well as head injuries from sports or accidents.

Protective factors include staying mentally and socially active, regular physical activity, healthy eating, regular health checks including vision and hearing.

[BrainTrack](#)⁵ is a free app that can help you monitor and understand changes in cognition over time, which you can use to start a conversation with your GP, and may lead to an earlier diagnosis of dementia.



Access to quality physical health care is a basic human right!

Keep asking until you and the people you support get the care they deserve.

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.

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

We can all help to improve health and save lives of people living with mental health conditions.



Looking after yourself

- **Ask** your GP for a health check, including hearing and vision.
- **Check** your cognitive health with the free [BrainTrack](#) app.⁵
- **Stay** socially connected through community activities.
- **Learn** a new skill (e.g. music, craft or language).
- **Support** brain health: exercise, eat well,⁶ sleep well, reduce alcohol and smoking, prevent head injuries.
- **Use** the [Taking Charge of your Care](#) resource to plan your physical health care.



Helping others

- **Access** [counselling](#), submit an [online referral](#), or call the National Dementia Helpline for advice on 1800 100 500.
- **Advise** about dementia prevention, including the importance of staying mentally and socially active, managing health conditions, and living a healthy lifestyle.
- **Support** them to arrange and attend appointments with health professionals.
- **Share** this factsheet widely.



Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness of higher dementia risks for people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for dementia risk factors.
- **Implement** tailored healthy lifestyle programs to reduce risk of dementia.
- **Equip** your service with resources available from [Dementia Australia](#).⁴
- **Seek** to coordinate mental and general healthcare.

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).

About dementia

Dementia is a term for conditions affecting memory, thinking, behaviour and everyday activities. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease, with other types including vascular dementia. Early diagnosis, support and healthy lifestyle changes can help people live well for longer and maintain independence.

More information is available from [Dementia Australia](#).

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.

Links *[click or scan]*



[Unequally Unwell
Summary Report](#)



[Full Report](#)



[Equally Well](#)

^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.



Factsheet #10

Dementia and mental health

1. Roberts R, Wong A, Lawn S, Lawrence D, Johnson C. Mortality of people using Australian Government-funded mental health services and prescription medications: Analysis of 2016 Census, death registry, MBS and PBS data. 2024.
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3. McGarvey C, Kenny RA, Kennelly S, Sexton D, Briggs R. How prevalent are modifiable dementia risk factors in Ireland? A 12-year observational study in community-dwelling older adults. *BMJ open*. 2025;15:e106032.
4. Dementia Australia. Dementia Australia is here for everyone [Available from: <https://www.dementia.org.au/>]
5. Dementia Australia. BrainTrack [Available from: <https://www.dementia.org.au/braintrack>].
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7. OECD. "Excess mortality", in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021.