



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

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

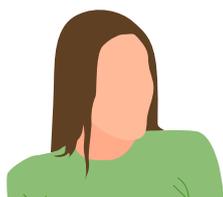
About lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases

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).

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.



[Equally Well](#)