



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 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 (a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low fat dairy foods)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 OECD[®]).

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, Disability and Ageing.



[Equally Well](#)