



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.<sup>1</sup>

### 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

### The health inequity

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

In Australia, cerebrovascular diseases cause:

- over 550 premature deaths<sup>b</sup> per year<sup>1</sup>
- over 200 (4 per week) of these deaths are 'potentially preventable'.<sup>1</sup>

People with mental health conditions are:

- 2 times more likely to die prematurely from cerebrovascular diseases<sup>1</sup>
- more than 2 times more likely to report having had a stroke<sup>3</sup>
- almost 3 times more likely to be hospitalised for high blood pressure
- have 3 times the average hospital bed days<sup>4</sup>
- likely to experience shorter times between further stroke events.<sup>5</sup>

### 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.

<sup>a</sup>Note this information is not a substitute for professional medical advice. For the most up-to-date information, visit the Stroke Foundation website.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Under 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<sup>1</sup>.**

Your actions will reduce the number of preventable deaths.

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

#### Further information

The Unequally Unwell report<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>8</sup>).

#### 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.



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