



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 **2 times more likely to die prematurely** from cerebrovascular diseases, including stroke.¹

For people with mental health conditions, cerebrovascular diseases cause:

- Over 550 premature deaths^a per year.¹
- And over 200 (4 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



Support healthy living, help save lives

Screening for risk factors helps start the conversation about supporting protective factors.

Risk factors for stroke include high blood pressure, excess body weight, high cholesterol, alcohol consumption, smoking, and diabetes.

Protective factors include regular physical activity, healthy eating, limiting alcohol, smoking cessation, managing health conditions (such as diabetes), and regular health checks.

The Stroke Foundation recommends the [F.A.S.T. test](#) as an easy way to remember the most common signs of stroke.²

- **Face** - has their mouth drooped?
- **Arms** - can they lift both arms?
- **Speech** - is their speech slurred?
- **Time** - time is critical, call 000



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 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 the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.



Helping others

- **Know** the warning signs: Learn the signs of stroke using the [FAST test](#).
- **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 factsheet widely.



Workplace & network

- **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.

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 OECD⁶).

About stroke

A stroke can be caused by a blocked or ruptured artery that prevents blood from reaching the brain.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

More information is available at [Stroke Foundation](#) or [Brain Foundation](#).

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 #6

Stroke 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.
2. Stroke Foundation. [Available from: <https://strokefoundation.org.au/>].
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Physical health of people with mental illness (Figure 1: Long-term health conditions reported by persons with and without mental illness in 2021; [Source: ABS 2022]) 2025 [Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health/physical-health-of-people-with-mental-illness>].
4. Sara G, Chen W, Large M, et al. Potentially preventable hospitalisations for physical health conditions in community mental health service users: a population-wide linkage study. *Epidemiol Psychiatr Sci.* 2021;30:e22.
5. Fleetwood K, Wild SH, Smith DJ, et al. Association of severe mental illness with stroke outcomes and process-of-care quality indicators: nationwide cohort study. *Br J Psychiatry.* 2022;221:394-401.
6. OECD. "Excess mortality", in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021.