



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**<sup>1</sup> by accessing freely available services.

**We can change this!**

### The health inequity

People with mental health conditions are **6 times more likely to die prematurely** from breast cancer.<sup>1</sup>

For people with mental health conditions, breast cancer causes:

- Over 970 premature deaths<sup>a</sup> per year.<sup>1</sup>
- And over 600 (12 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.<sup>1</sup>



### Breast cancer screening saves lives<sup>b</sup>

Treatment is very effective if detected early, and 5-year survival rates are 93%.<sup>6</sup>

! People with mental health conditions are:

- **22% less likely** to complete mammograms<sup>2</sup>
- **22%-30% less likely** to receive guideline-recommended treatment after diagnosis.<sup>3,4</sup>

Initial testing for breast cancer involves a mammogram.

Women over 40 years old can have a free mammogram every 2 years, and women aged 50 to 74 are strongly encouraged to screen regularly.<sup>5</sup>

Age and family history are the main risk factors for breast cancer, as well as lifestyle factors such as physical inactivity, alcohol intake, smoking and poor diet.<sup>7</sup>



**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.<sup>1</sup>

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



### Looking after yourself

- **Inspect** your breasts regularly.<sup>8</sup>
- **Report** anything unusual to your doctor. Early detection significantly improves outcome.
- **Ask** your GP about screening options.
- **Get support** from [McGrath Cancer Care Nurses](#)<sup>9</sup>, or support networks from [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#).<sup>11</sup>
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) and [iPrevent tool](#).<sup>10</sup>



### Helping others

- **Ask** friends or family about their health, and when they last saw their GP.
- **Advise** about breast cancer screening options available.
- **Assist** by supporting them to arrange and attend GP appointments.
- **Share** this factsheet in places such as your workplace, health services, libraries, community spaces and with friends and colleagues.



### Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness of higher breast cancer risks for people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for women over 40 years old.
- **Equip** your service with resources available from the [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#).<sup>11</sup>
- **Seek** to coordinate mental and general healthcare.

### 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 OECD13).

#### About breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women. Breast cancer can develop at any age, but is more likely as you get older.

More information is available from

[Cancer Australia](#),<sup>8</sup> the [National Breast Cancer Foundation](#),<sup>7</sup> [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#),<sup>11</sup> and the [McGrath Foundation](#).<sup>12</sup>

#### 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](#)

<sup>a</sup> Premature is defined as between the age of 15 to 74 years.

<sup>b</sup> Please note, this information is not a substitute for professional medical advice.



## Factsheet #8

## Breast cancer and mental health

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