



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.

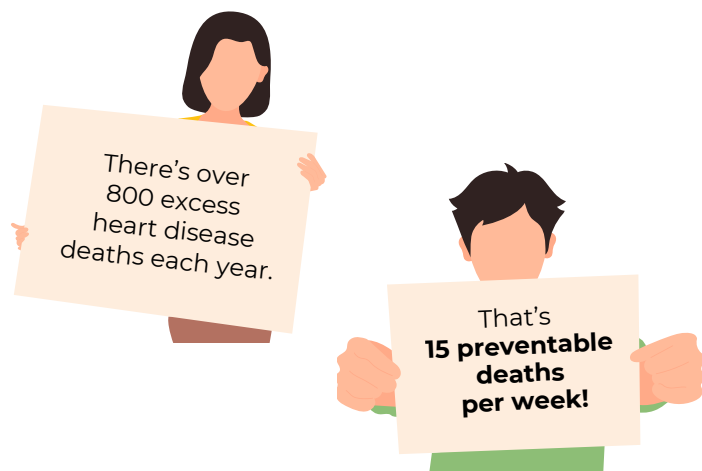
**We can change this!**

## The health inequity

People with mental health conditions are more than **twice as likely to die prematurely** from heart disease.<sup>1</sup>

For people with mental health conditions, heart disease causes:

- over 1,800 premature deaths<sup>a</sup> per year<sup>1</sup>
- and more than 800 (15 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.<sup>1</sup>



People with mental health conditions are more than twice as likely to be hospitalised, with more than three times the average days in hospital due to heart conditions.<sup>2</sup> Sudden heart failure may be up to 11 times higher in people with schizophrenia.<sup>3</sup>

## Support healthy living, help save lives<sup>b</sup>

Screening for heart disease risk factors helps start the conversation about supporting and improving heart health.

Managing health conditions such as high blood pressure, cholesterol or diabetes, supports overall heart health. Physical inactivity, poor diet, smoking, and alcohol intake are the main lifestyle risks. Viruses such as the flu can also increase the chance of heart attack after infection because of inflammation.<sup>4</sup>

Routine assessment, tailored support, proactive follow-up and clear communication can support people with mental health conditions to engage in healthcare and self-care.<sup>5</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<sup>1</sup>, 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

- **Ask** your GP for a health check. Medicare covered<sup>c</sup> Heart Health Checks are available for people 45yrs+ (30yrs+ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples).<sup>6</sup>
- **Check** your risk with the Heart Foundation [‘heart age’](#) calculator.<sup>7</sup>
- **Stay heart-healthy:** be active,<sup>8</sup> eat well,<sup>9</sup> reduce alcohol, quit smoking, and manage cholesterol and blood pressure.
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of Your Care resource](#) to plan your physical health care.



### Helping others

- **Access** information on prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs.
- **Provide** heart health advice, including condition management and free Heart Health Checks.
- **Support** arranging and attending GP or pharmacist appointments for medications and vaccinations.
- **Share** this factsheet in workplaces, health services, libraries, community spaces, and with others.



### Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness of higher heart disease risks for people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for risk factors and follow-up treatment and support.
- **Implement** tailored programs to promote heart health and support people with mental health conditions to access the care they need.
- **Equip** your service with resources available from the Heart Foundation.<sup>11</sup>
- **Seek** to coordinate mental and general healthcare.

### Further information

Equally Well's national monitoring 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>13</sup>).

### About heart disease

Heart disease is a broad term for conditions that affect the heart, including problems with its blood supply, rhythm, structure, or function. The most common form is ischaemic (coronary) heart disease, where narrowed or blocked arteries reduce blood flow to the heart muscle and can cause chest pain or a heart attack.

More information is available from the [Heart 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](#)

<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.

<sup>c</sup> GPs who don't bulk bill may charge a gap fee.



## Factsheet #11

## Heart disease 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. 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.
3. Paratz ED, van Heusden A, Zentner D, et al. Sudden cardiac death in people with schizophrenia: higher risk, poorer resuscitation profiles, and differing pathologies. *Clinical Electrophysiology.* 2023;9:1310-8.
4. Heart Foundation. Are you at risk of heart disease? 2026 [Available from: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/are-you-at-risk-of-heart-disease>]
5. Vaccarino V, Prescott E, Shah AJ, et al. Mental health disorders and their impact on cardiovascular health disparities. *The Lancet Regional Health–Europe.* 2025;56.
6. Heart Foundation. Keeping your heart healthy is something you can work on every day 2026 [Available from: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/healthy-living/keeping-your-heart-healthy>]
7. Heart Foundation. Know your risk 2026 [Available from: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/know-your-risk>]
8. Stamatakis E, Biswas RK, Koemel NA, et al. Dose response of incidental physical activity against cardiovascular events and mortality. *Circulation.* 2025;151:1063-75.
9. Heart Foundation. Heart-healthy Dinner Plans 2026 [Available from: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/heart-healthy-dinner-plans>]
10. Heart Foundation. Support and care. 2026.
11. Heart Foundation. For health professionals 2026 [Available from: [<https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/for-professionals>]]
12. Dementia Australia. Dementia Australia is here for everyone [Available from: <https://www.dementia.org.au/>].
13. OECD. "Excess mortality", in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021.