



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](#). There is an 11-year life expectancy gap for people living with mental illness – two-thirds of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹

Blood and lymph cancers

Blood and lymph cancers (including leukemia, lymphoma, and myeloma) disrupt normal blood cell production and immune function.^{2, 3}

With appropriate screening and treatment, the 5-year survival rates range from 55% for myeloma, 65% for leukaemia, and 75% for lymphoma.⁴

People with mental illness are 3 times more likely to die of blood and lymph cancer than the general population.¹

In Australia:

- Blood and lymph cancers accounted for 1,865 deaths among people accessing mental health-related treatments.¹
- Almost half of these deaths were 'excess'.



People with mental illness are less likely to be screened for blood and lymph cancers.

People with severe mental illness are **2.1 times more likely to die** from cancer before age 75, but their cancer screening rates remain low.⁶

Cancer diagnosis therefore happens at a more advanced stage, which negatively impacts survival rates.⁵

Common barriers to screening and diagnosis include:



Stigmatising attitudes and poor communication



Accessibility problems such as affordability of care and access issues.⁷

Help and support from healthcare providers, friends, and family facilitates access.⁷

These cancers have a further negative impact on mental health:

- People who have mental health issues prior to cancer diagnosis have 2-3 times higher chances of mental health difficulties after diagnosis,⁸ which further reduces likelihood of survival.⁹

Together, we can make a difference.

There are lots of ways we can work together for equity in cancer screening and treatment for people living with mental health conditions.

Look after yourself

- **Ask** your doctor for a routine health check or ask a health professional or someone close to you for support with arranging or attending appointments.
- **Empower** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.
- **Discover** ways to improve your health and wellbeing through by exploring Equally Well's [resources](#).

How to help others

- **Ask** about their health and if they need support to arrange a health check-up.
- **Advise** about regular health checks and screens, and opportunities for improving health and wellbeing.
- **Assist** with overcoming barriers and implementing strategies to help them maintain good health.
- **Share** this fact sheet widely to improve awareness in libraries, health services, with your friends and colleagues.

Activate your workplace

- **Equip** your service by establishing cancer screening resources and referral tools for your service.
- **Coordinate** care by establishing partnerships between mental health services and primary care providers to facilitate screening and follow-up care.

Everyone can play a role to advocate for health care equity. Access to quality physical health care is a basic human right for everyone– keep asking until you and the people you support get the care you deserve.

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.”

More information

The Unequally Unwell report examined the premature mortality and preventable deaths* for people living with mental health conditions.

*Preventable deaths are defined as the number of deaths in a section of the population above that expected, based on the total population death rates. (OECD. "Excess mortality", in Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021).

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About Equally Well

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Factsheet #1

Blood & lymph cancer 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. Cancer Council. [Available from: <https://www.cancercouncil.com.au/blood-cancers/>]
3. Leukaemia Foundation [Available from: <https://www.leukaemia.org.au/blood-cancer/>]
4. Cancer Australia [Available from: <https://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/all-cancer-types>]
5. Solmi M, Firth J, Miola A, et al. Disparities in cancer screening in people with mental illness across the world versus the general population: prevalence and comparative meta-analysis including 4 717 839 people. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2020;7:52-63.
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7. Tuschick E, Barker J, Giles EL, et al. Barriers and facilitators for people with severe mental illness accessing cancer screening: A systematic review. *Psycho-Oncology*. 2024;33:e6274.
8. Kuczmarski TM, Jaung T, Mancuso CE, et al. Precancer and cancer-associated depression and anxiety among older adults with blood cancers in the United States. *Blood Advances*. 2022;6:1126-36.
9. Kuczmarski TM, Tramontano AC, Mozessohn L, et al. Mental health disorders and survival among older patients with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma in the USA: a population-based study. *The Lancet Haematology*. 2023;10:e530-e8.



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Influenza and pneumonia

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a contagious virus that affects the nose, throat and lungs. Influenza is more serious than the common cold, and can lead to secondary lung infections such as pneumonia. Vaccination can prevent the flu, and associated complications.²

Influenza and pneumonia disproportionately affect people accessing mental healthcare.

In Australia, people accessing mental health-related treatments are 3 times more likely to be hospitalised, and have 7 times the average hospital bed days due to vaccine-preventable flu and pneumonia compared with the rest of the population.³

This results in:

- 2,016 deaths per year¹, of which
- 1,242 deaths (more than half) are 'excess', or potentially preventable¹.

People with mental health conditions are **3 to 5 times more likely to die** from influenza and pneumonia.^{1,4}

Vaccination saves lives by:

- Protecting the health of people living with mental health conditions.
- Limiting the spread of flu to family, friends and the community.
- Helping prevent illness, hospitalisation and death.
- Taking pressure off our already overstretched hospital and health services.

People with mental health conditions are less likely to access influenza vaccinations.



21%

People experiencing frequent mental distress have 21% lower vaccination rates than those without distress.⁷



People with severe mental illness have about half the vaccine coverage of the general population.^{8,9}

Vaccine Equity and 'Right to Health'

The World Health Organisation reinforced that "immunisation is, and should be recognised as a core component of the human right to health".^{5, 6}

There are lots of ways we can work together for equity in vaccination access for people living with mental health conditions.

Look after yourself

- **Ask** your doctor and healthcare professional about vaccinations you can access, and if necessary, for help with arranging or attending appointments.
- **Equip** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) on the Equally Well website to plan the physical health care you want.

How to help others

- **Ask** when they last had their vaccinations.
- **Advise** about the benefit of preventing viruses and possibility of spreading it to others.
- **Assist** by providing support to find information, and attend appointments.
- **Share** this fact sheet widely to improve awareness in libraries, health services, and with your friends and colleagues.

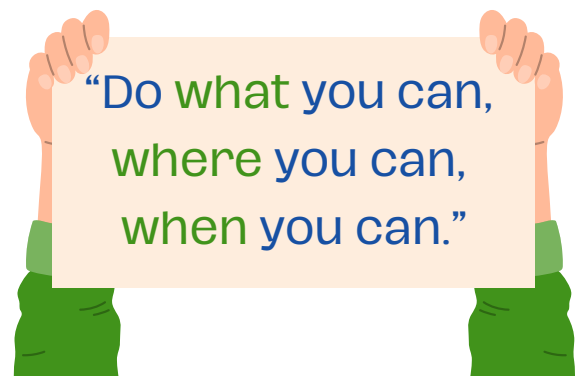
Activate your workplace

- **Equip** your service by promoting vaccination information resources.
- **Embed** preventative care into usual practice and implement reminder systems to prompt staff to discuss vaccinations with consumers.
- **Coordinate** care with local community pharmacies and primary care clinics.
- **Arrange** provision of vaccinations directly at mental health facilities or establish mobile vaccination services in residential facilities.

Everyone can play a role to advocate for health care equity. Access to quality physical health care is a basic human right for everyone – keep asking until you and the people you support get the care you deserve.

Every day in Australia 46 people with mental illness die of preventable* health conditions.¹

If we share the responsibility, we can ensure that one of these 46 is not someone we know and care for.



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 excess or potentially preventable deaths in a section of the population above that expected based on the total population death rates.¹²

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Factsheet #2

Influenza and vaccine equity

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.
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10. OECD. "Excess mortality", in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021.



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Lung cancer is the **most common** cause of premature* death in people living with mental illness.¹

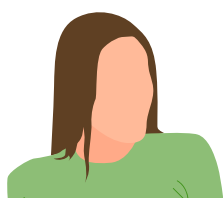
About lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases

Lung and respiratory conditions, such as lung cancer, asthma and bronchitis, are characterised by symptoms like breathlessness, wheezing, and chronic cough.

Anyone can get lung and respiratory diseases, and they are the second leading cause of death in Australia.²

For people living with mental health conditions,

- lung cancer causes over 2,000 premature deaths per year,¹ and
- over 1,300 of these deaths are **potentially preventable**.⁹



Every week there are 25 potentially preventable deaths from lung cancer, and 18 potentially preventable deaths due to respiratory disease.¹

People with mental health conditions are:

- 4x** more likely to die prematurely from lung cancer¹
- 5x** more likely to die prematurely from respiratory diseases¹
- 5x** more likely to be hospitalised due to respiratory conditions³
- 6x** the average hospital bed days due to respiratory conditions.³

If detected early, the survival rates for lung cancer are as high as 68%.⁴

Smoking cessation saves lives

Smoking kills 1 in 2 long-term smokers.⁵

The risk of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases is 15-30 times higher in people who smoke.⁶

Smoking cessation support can help people with mental health conditions reduce or quit smoking,⁷ particularly if face-to-face support and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) options are offered.⁸

Stop smoking. Start living.

*'Premature' referring to under the age of 75 years.

There are many ways we can work together to promote lung and respiratory health for people living with mental health conditions.

Look after yourself

- **Ask** about *lung cancer screening* and *smoking cessation support*.
- **Access** free lung cancer screening and respiratory function tests, and smoking cessation services such as the [My QuitBuddy](#) app or Quitline (13 78 48).
- **Explore** community opportunities to become more *physically active* to improve lung health, and if necessary, ask for support to attend.
- **Equip** yourself with our [consumer resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.

How to help others

- **Ask** about their lung health, and if they smoke, ask if they have thought about quitting.
- **Advise** about the [lung health](#) support options available and the benefit of smoking cessation.
- **Assist** by providing support to attend appointments for lung and respiratory assessments, and smoking cessation support.
- **Share** this factsheet widely in your workplace, health services, libraries, community spaces and with your friends and colleagues.



Activate your workplace

- **Promote** staff awareness of lung health risks and the early warning signs.
- **Equip** your service by promoting [respiratory health and screening resources](#).
- **Encourage** proactive screening and treatment.
- **Advocate** to ensure equity of access to smoking cessation supports such as Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRT) or quit lines for people with mental health conditions.
- **Coordinate** mental and respiratory healthcare and implement smoking cessation programs tailored for people with mental health challenges.

Every day in Australia, 46 people with mental illness die of preventable health conditions¹.

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 OECD⁸).

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Factsheet #3

Lung cancer 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. Lung Foundation. [Available from: <https://lungfoundation.com.au/lung-health/lung-disease/what-is-lung-disease/>]
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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 **4 times more likely to die prematurely** from bowel cancer, and if under 55 years old the risk is 7 times greater.¹

For people with mental health conditions, bowel cancer causes:

- Over 900 premature deaths^a per year.¹
- And over 500 (10 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



Bowel cancer screening saves lives^b

Bowel cancer survival rate is 72%.
If detected early it is close to 100%.

People with a mental health condition are significantly *less likely* to:

- complete a bowel screening test^{4,5}
- complete the test correctly^{4,5}
- receive a follow-up colonoscopy after a positive test result.^{4,5}

! Only **1 in 4** people with a mental health condition complete a bowel screening test.^{4,5}

Don't delay. Do it today.

Screening involves a simple at-home test for people who do not have obvious symptoms of disease, and may detect early signs.

Delaying screening leads to lower survival rates.

If aged over 45 years, you can [request a kit online](#).



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

- **Get a bowel screening test kit** from your GP, or [request a screening kit online](#) or by calling 1800 627 701.
- **Familiarise** yourself with the [common symptoms](#) and early warning signs.
- **Ask** your relatives about any history of bowel cancer.
- **Explore** opportunities to be more physically active, eat healthy, and reduce alcohol and smoking.
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) to plan your physical healthcare.



Helping others

- **Ask** if they have completed, and returned their bowel cancer screening test.
- **Advise** about the bowel screening support options available, and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.
- **Assist** with ordering a screening kit, and support them to schedule and attend GP appointments.
- **Share** this factsheet widely. Ask if you can put in on noticeboards, libraries, GP reception rooms and staff rooms.



Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness of increased risk of bowel cancer for people with mental health conditions.
- **Bulk order** testing kits to give out at appointments as needed.
- **Encourage** proactive screening and treatment.
- **Implement** targeted healthy lifestyle programs tailored for people with mental health challenges.

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 OECD²).

About bowel cancer

Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal, colon, or rectal cancer, develops from the inner lining of the bowel. Incidence of bowel cancer is increasing in Australia, especially in people under 50 years old.^{2,3}

More information is available at [Cancer Council](#), [Cancer Australia](#), or [Bowel Cancer Australia](#).

About Equally Well

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^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 #4

Bowel cancer 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.
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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 OECD⁹).

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Factsheet #5

Diabetes 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.
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8. OECD. "Excess mortality", in *Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2021.



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.

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^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

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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 **5 times more likely to die prematurely** from prostate cancer.¹

For people with mental health conditions, breast cancer causes:

- Over 460 premature deaths^a per year.¹
- And over 300 (6 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



The main known risk factors for prostate cancer are age, and family history.

Prostate cancer screening saves lives^b

If detected early, survival rates are more than 95%.²

! People with mental health conditions are:

- **34% less likely** to receive surgery after diagnosis³
- **17%-40% less likely** to complete initial screening for prostate cancer.^{4,5}

Initial testing for prostate cancer involves a blood test called a PSA test (prostate specific antigen test).

Men are encouraged to speak to their doctor about a risk assessment so they can make an informed choice about prostate cancer testing. PSA testing every year may be recommended for men over 50 years old.



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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

- **Know** your [risk factors](#).
- **Ask** your GP about screening options if you are over 50 years old, have a family history of prostate cancer, or if you have [symptoms](#).
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.



Helping others

- **Ask** friends or family about their health, and when they last saw their GP.
- **Advise** about prostate 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, or with friends and colleagues.



Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness of higher prostate cancer risks for people with mental illness.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for men, male-assigned non-binary people, transgender men, and intersex people over 50 years old.
- **Equip** your service [by providing resources](#) about prostate cancer survivorship.
- **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 prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in men. Some prostate cancers grow slowly and may not cause problems, while others can grow quickly and need treatment.²

More information is available from [Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia](#), or the [Australian Prostate Centre](#) website.

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Factsheet #7

Prostate cancer 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.
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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 **6 times more likely to die prematurely** from breast cancer.¹

For people with mental health conditions, breast cancer causes:

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



Breast cancer screening saves lives^b

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

! People with mental health conditions are:

- **22% less likely** to complete mammograms²
- **22%-30% less likely** to receive guideline-recommended treatment after diagnosis.^{3,4}

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.⁵

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.⁷



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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

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



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](#).¹¹
- **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 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](#),⁸ the [National Breast Cancer Foundation](#),⁷ [Breast Cancer Network Australia](#),¹¹ and the [McGrath Foundation](#).¹²

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Factsheet #8

Breast cancer and mental health

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Two-thirds of these deaths are **preventable**¹ by accessing freely available services.

We can change this!

The health inequity

In Australia, people with mental health conditions are **3 times more likely to die prematurely** from skin cancer.¹

For people with mental health conditions, skin cancer causes:

- almost 400 premature deaths^a per year¹
- and over 240 (5 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



Skin cancer screening saves lives^b

With early detection, 5-year survival rates for skin cancers such as melanoma are around 94%.³

Most GPs can perform a skin check and refer to a specialist. Many skin cancer clinics also bulk bill for standard screening, especially for healthcare card holders.

Risk factors for skin cancer include sun exposure and a history of sunburn. People with many or atypical moles, a personal or family history of melanoma, or features such as fair skin, red hair, blue eyes, and older age are at higher risk.

You can check your risk using [QIMR Berghofer's melanoma risk calculator](#).

Prevention is key: Minimise exposure to the sun using these common methods:



SLIP



SLOP



SLAP



SEEK



SLIDE



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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

- **Check your skin** for moles or blemishes to learn what is normal for you.
- **Report** changes to your doctor. Early detection significantly improves outcomes.
- **Ask** your GP about screening options if you believe you may be at risk.³
- **Check your risk** using the evidence-based [melanoma risk calculator](#).⁶
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) to plan the physical health care you want.



Helping others

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



Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness about the barriers to skin cancer screening for people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for adults over 18 years old.
- **Equip** your service with resources available from the [Melanoma Institute Australia](#).⁷
- **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 OECD⁸).

About skin cancer

Skin cancer is one of the most common cancers in Australia, and while it can be life-threatening, early treatment is highly effective. Most skin cancers are caused by exposure to UV radiation from the sun, so limiting excess sun exposure is key to prevention. Skin checks by your GP or a skin clinic can help with early detection.

More information is available from [Cancer Australia](#) or [Melanoma Institute Australia](#).

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Factsheet #9

Skin cancer and mental health

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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 **24 times more likely to die prematurely** from dementia.¹ This heightened risk is greatest for people aged under 75 years.

For people with mental health conditions, dementia causes:

- Over 380 premature deaths^a per year¹
- and over 290 (6 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



Mental illness symptoms in mid-late life may 'mask' dementia onset, causing delays in diagnosis and treatment.²

Support healthy living, help save lives^b

Up to 45% of dementia may be preventable.³ Screening for risk factors helps start the conversation about supporting protective factors.⁴

Risk factors for dementia include high blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, alcohol consumption, and smoking, as well as head injuries from sports or accidents.

Protective factors include staying mentally and socially active, regular physical activity, healthy eating, regular health checks including vision and hearing.

[BrainTrack](#)⁵ is a free app that can help you monitor and understand changes in cognition over time, which you can use to start a conversation with your GP, and may lead to an earlier diagnosis of dementia.



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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 for a health check, including hearing and vision.
- **Check** your cognitive health with the free [BrainTrack](#) app.⁵
- **Stay** socially connected through community activities.
- **Learn** a new skill (e.g. music, craft or language).
- **Support** brain health: exercise, eat well,⁶ sleep well, reduce alcohol and smoking, prevent head injuries.
- **Use** the [Taking Charge of your Care](#) resource to plan your physical health care.



Helping others

- **Access** [counselling](#), submit an [online referral](#), or call the National Dementia Helpline for advice on 1800 100 500.
- **Advise** about dementia prevention, including the importance of staying mentally and socially active, managing health conditions, and living a healthy lifestyle.
- **Support** them to arrange and attend appointments with health professionals.
- **Share** this factsheet widely.



Workplace & network

- **Promote** staff awareness of higher dementia risks for people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening for dementia risk factors.
- **Implement** tailored healthy lifestyle programs to reduce risk of dementia.
- **Equip** your service with resources available from [Dementia Australia](#).⁴
- **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 OECD⁷).

About dementia

Dementia is a term for conditions affecting memory, thinking, behaviour and everyday activities. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease, with other types including vascular dementia. Early diagnosis, support and healthy lifestyle changes can help people live well for longer and maintain independence.

More information is available from [Dementia Australia](#).

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Factsheet #10

Dementia and mental health

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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 more than **twice as likely to die prematurely** from heart disease.¹

For people with mental health conditions, heart disease causes:

- over 1,800 premature deaths^a per year¹
- and more than 800 (15 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



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.² Sudden heart failure may be up to 11 times higher in people with schizophrenia.³

Support healthy living, help save lives^b

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.⁴

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



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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 for a health check. Medicare covered^c Heart Health Checks are available for people 45yrs+ (30yrs+ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples).⁶
- **Check** your risk with the Heart Foundation [‘heart age’](#) calculator.⁷
- **Stay heart-healthy:** be active,⁸ eat well,⁹ 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.¹¹
- **Seek** to coordinate mental and general healthcare.

Further information

Equally Well's national monitoring 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 OECD¹³).

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](#).

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^c 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.
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