



ADDRESSING THE HEALTH INEQUITY

An Equally Well Factsheet Series

12 evidence-based factsheets highlighting preventable physical health inequities and practical actions for change

2026



Background

Equally Well Australia is a national collective of organisations committed to improving the physical health of people living with mental health conditions. Drawing on Equally Well's national monitoring report, this series highlights that people living with mental health conditions die, on average, 11 years earlier than the general population, with two-thirds of these deaths potentially preventable. It brings visibility to the scale, causes and preventability of premature mortality, while reinforcing that access to high-quality physical healthcare is a fundamental human right.

Each 2-page factsheet explores a major contributor to preventable morbidity and mortality, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disease and other chronic health conditions. Together, they highlight the systemic barriers and inequities experienced by people living with mental health conditions, reframe these outcomes as preventable rather than inevitable, and promote the importance of prevention, early detection and timely intervention. This collection has been developed as a practical, action-oriented resource for a broad audience, including individuals, families and carers, health professionals, services, and community organisations.

Every factsheet provides clear, evidence-informed actions to support health monitoring, encourage engagement with care, and strengthen coordination between mental and physical healthcare. In doing so, the series reflects a core principle of Equally Well Australia: improving physical health outcomes is a shared responsibility that requires collaboration across sectors, disciplines and communities. By combining the latest national evidence with practical actions, these factsheets aim to inform practice, support advocacy, and contribute to achieving better health equity for people living with mental health conditions.

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Blood cancers and mental health



EQUALLYWELL

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.

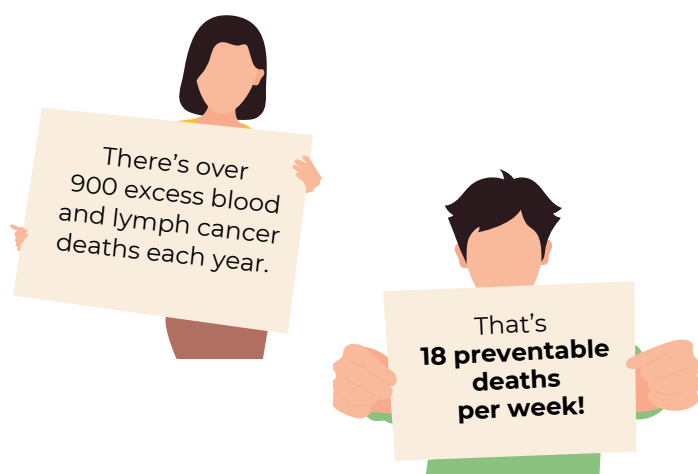
We can change this!

The health inequity

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

For people with mental health conditions, blood and lymph cancers cause:

- over 1,800 premature deaths^a per year¹,
- and about 900 (18 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



The main known risk factors for blood and lymph cancers are age, family genetics, chemical and radiation exposure, and immune system health.²

Cancer screening saves lives

With appropriate screening and treatment, the 5-year survival rates range from 55% for myeloma, 65% for leukaemia, and 75% for lymphoma.³

People with mental illness are less likely to be screened for blood and lymph cancers.⁴ 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.⁶

Help and support from healthcare providers, friends, and family facilitates access.⁶



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, 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 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 the [Taking Charge of your Care](#) resource and plan the physical health care you want.
- **Discover** ways to improve your health and wellbeing through by exploring Equally Well's [resources library](#).



Helping others

- **Ask** about their health and whether they need support arranging a check-up.
- **Encourage** regular health checks, screenings, and opportunities to improve wellbeing.
- **Help** address barriers and identify strategies to support good health.
- **Share** this factsheet widely to raise awareness in libraries, health services, and among friends and colleagues.



Workplace & network

- **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.

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 OECD⁷).

About blood and lymph cancer

Blood and lymph cancers affect the blood, bone marrow, lymphatic system, or immune cells and disrupts normal blood cell production and immune function. These include leukemia, lymphoma, and myeloma.

More information is available at [Cancer Council](#) and [Leukaemia Foundation](#)

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.



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.

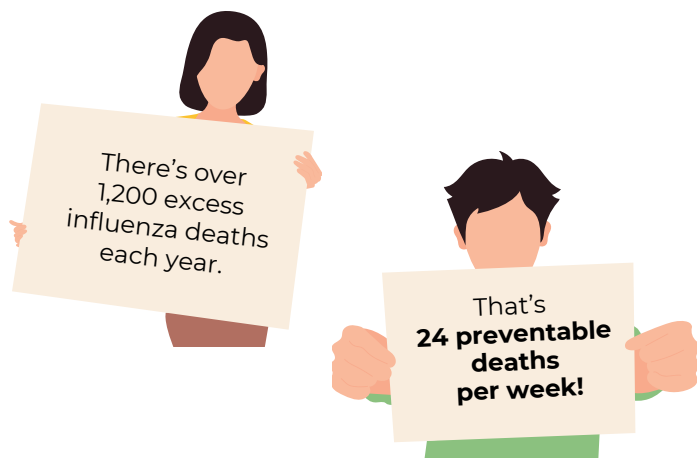
We can change this!

The health inequity

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

For people with mental health conditions, influenza causes:

- Over 2,000 premature deaths per year^a,
- and over 1,200 of these deaths are potentially preventable¹.



In Australia, people accessing mental health-related treatments are 3 times more likely to be hospitalised due to vaccine-preventable flu and pneumonia compared with the rest of the population.²

Vaccination can prevent the flu, and associated complications³ by:

- Protecting people living with mental health conditions
- Reducing the spread of flu to family, friends and the community
- Helping prevent serious illness, hospitalisation and death
- Easing pressure on overstretched health services

Professional recommendation and improving access are key to increasing vaccination uptake.^{4, 5, 6}



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.^{4, 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".⁸



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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 doctor and healthcare professional about vaccinations you can access, and if necessary, for help with arranging or attending appointments.
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care](#) resource and plan the physical health care you want.



Helping 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 factsheet widely to improve awareness in libraries, health services, and with your friends and colleagues.



Workplace & network

- **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.

Further information

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About 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.

More information is available at [NSW Health](#) and [Lung Foundation](#).

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Lung cancer and mental health



EQUALLYWELL

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 lung cancer, and 5 times more likely to die prematurely from respiratory diseases.¹

For people with mental health conditions, lung cancer causes:

- over 2,000 premature^a deaths per year¹
- and over 1,300 (25 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.



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

Lung cancer screening is now available.

If detected early, the survival rates for lung cancer are over 65%.^{2,3}

[Lung screening](#) is free, quick and painless.

It involves a low-dose Computed Tomography (CT) scan of your chest to look for signs of lung cancer before symptoms start.³

Ask your doctor if you are eligible.

Smoking cessation saves lives

Smoking kills 1 in 2 long-term smokers.⁴

The risk of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases is 15-30 times higher in people who smoke.⁵

Smoking cessation support can help people with mental health conditions reduce or quit smoking, particularly if face-to-face support and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) options are offered.⁶



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



Looking 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.
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) to plan your physical healthcare.



Helping others

- **Ask** about their lung health and, if they smoke, whether they have considered quitting.
- **Advise** on available lung health supports and the benefits of quitting smoking.
- **Assist** with attending lung and respiratory assessments, and accessing smoking cessation support.
- **Share** this factsheet widely in workplaces, health services, libraries, community spaces and with friends and colleagues.



Workplace & network

- **Improve** staff awareness of risk factors and early warning signs.
- **Promote** [respiratory health and screening resources](#) across your service.
- **Support** proactive screening, assessment and treatment.
- **Advocate** for equitable access to smoking cessation supports, including Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRT) and quit lines.
- **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 OECD⁷).

About lung cancer

Lung cancer begins when abnormal cells grow and multiply in an uncontrolled way in the lungs. Most cases of lung cancer are caused by tobacco smoking.

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

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Bowel cancer and mental health



EQUALLYWELL

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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](#).



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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

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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](#).

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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 diabetes.¹

For people with mental health conditions, diabetes causes:

- over 680 premature^a deaths per year¹
- and over 380 (7 per week) of these deaths are 'potentially preventable'.¹



Support healthy living, help save lives^b

Early action can prevent or delay diabetes, reduce the impact of diabetes, and improve quality of life and longevity.²

Protective factors include:

- regular physical activity³
- healthy eating⁴
- sleep and stress management
- reducing or quitting smoking and alcohol

Diabetes screening helps people get support sooner

A fasting blood glucose (blood sugar) test can diagnose diabetes or detect if someone is pre-diabetic (at risk of developing diabetes).²

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.



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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

- **Know** your [risk factors](#).
- **Look out** for diabetes warning signs.
- **Ask** your health professional about screening.
- **Explore** [free diabetes prevention programs](#) that promote physical activity, healthy eating, improving sleep, and reducing alcohol and smoking.
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care resource](#) to plan your physical healthcare.



Helping 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.
- **Share** this factsheet widely.



Workplace & network

- **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.

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 OECD⁵).

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.

More information is available at [Diabetes Australia](#).

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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 **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



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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 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

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 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](#).

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Prostate cancer and mental health



EQUALLYWELL

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, prostate 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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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

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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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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

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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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

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 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

About Equally Well

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^b Please note, this information is not a substitute for professional medical advice.



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

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

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 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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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.



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, 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 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

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 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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Heart disease and mental health



EQUALLYWELL

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.

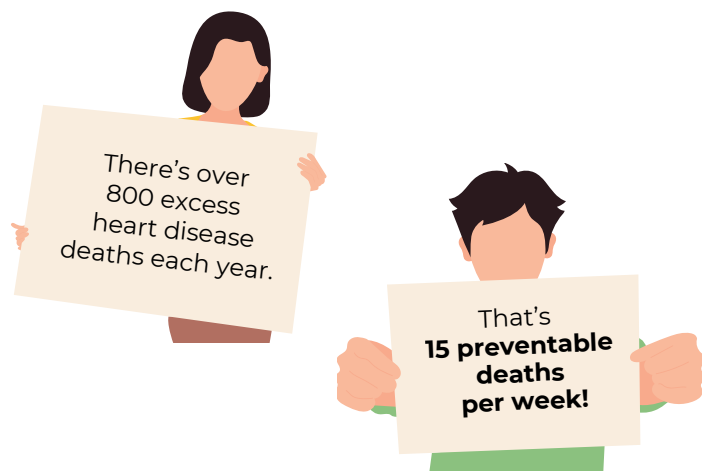
We can change this!

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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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, 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 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.

Kidney disease and mental health



EQUALLYWELL

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 **six times as likely** to die prematurely from kidney diseases.¹

For people with mental health conditions, kidney diseases cause:

- Over 270 premature deaths a per year.¹
- And over 190 (4 per week) of these deaths are potentially preventable.¹



People with severe mental illnesses are only half as likely to be placed on a kidney transplant waitlist, indicating disparities in access to treatments.²

Screening saves lives.^b

Routine blood tests can detect kidney function problems, and a urine test can check for early signs of kidney damage, helping to identify problems early.

Screening for kidney disease is important, because kidneys can lose up to 90% of functioning without symptoms.

One in 7 Australians have signs of kidney disease,⁴ and more than half (~2.5 million people) are unaware of their risk because they have no symptoms.

Undiagnosed kidney disease can lead to kidney failure if not diagnosed and treated.

Diabetes, high blood pressure, older age, and medications such as lithium increase kidney-related risk factors and the need for routine testing.



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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 kidney function test – both urine and blood tests.⁵
- **Check** your risk factors using the Kidney Health Australia '[Kidney Risk Test](#)'.⁶
- **Explore** opportunities to be 'kidney-healthy' through physical activity, healthy eating, reducing alcohol and smoking, and managing blood pressure.⁷
- **Access** peer support or support groups for people with kidney diseases.⁸
- **Equip** yourself with the [Taking Charge of your Care](#) resource to plan the physical health care you want.



Helping others

- **Seek** advice about kidney health and diagnosis implications using the [Kidney Helpline](#).⁹
- **Advise** about kidney health, including managing other health conditions such as diabetes, and 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

- **Raise** staff awareness of elevated kidney disease risk in people with mental health conditions.
- **Encourage** proactive screening, follow-up treatment, and support.
- **Implement** tailored kidney health programs for this population.
- **Use** the [CKD-Go! app](#) for resources and action plans.¹⁰
- **Access** resources via the [Kidney Health Professional Hub](#).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 OECD¹²).

About urinary diseases

Chronic kidney disease and acute kidney injury are the main contributors to mortality from diseases of the urinary system as reported in Equally Well's national monitoring report.¹ Other urinary conditions, such as urinary tract infections, kidney stones, urinary retention, and hydronephrosis can lead to serious complications such as infection and kidney failure if left untreated. More information is available from [Kidney Health Australia](#).

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