

Bowel screening saves lives, but only 1 in 4 people* access it

Source: Kisely, S., et al. Participation in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program by people with severe mental illness, Australia, 2006–2019: a national data linkage study, MJA, 2024

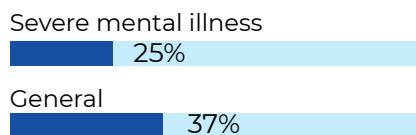


Quick take

People with severe mental illness experience similar rates of bowel cancer as the general population, but are more likely to die from it. This study found that only ***1 in 4 people** with severe mental illness **participate in bowel cancer screening**, and those who receive a positive test result are also less likely to undergo a follow-up colonoscopy.

Key findings

Bowel screening access



- **25%** of people with severe mental illness accessed bowel screening, compared with **37%** of the general population.
- People with severe mental illness were **2x more likely** to test positive.
- **Only 72%** of those with a positive result had a follow-up colonoscopy.
- Screening participation was lowest among **men**, people in **remote areas**, and those in areas of **highest disadvantage**.

Read more

Equally Well website



Bowel cancer factsheet



Acronym guide

NBCSP National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

Methods at a glance



1.2 million people

An icon representing a group of people, shown as several blue silhouettes of human figures.

119,000 classified

An icon of a brain with the letters "SMI" inside a pink speech bubble.

Data linked across National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP), Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)

Key issues → Practical recommendations



The NBCSP has not closed the equity gap for people with severe mental illness

→ support people with severe mental illness to complete bowel screening



Remove barriers to testing, treatment and follow-up

→ over 90% cure rate if detected early



Support is needed across the pathway

→ people with severe mental illness need increased support at all stages of screening and follow-up treatment

Author's conclusion

“ The NBCSP has not reduced inequity in bowel cancer screening for people with mental illnesses. Access to screening may be one factor in poorer colorectal cancer outcomes for people with severe mental illness. ”