

The missing mammograms in mental health

Breast cancer screening participation in women using mental health services in NSW, Australia: a population study Lambeth, C., et al., Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 2024. doi: 10.1007/s00127-023-02509-w



Quick take

Women who access publicly funded mental health services are much less likely to participate in breast cancer screening than other women, and this disparity is not explained by age, socioeconomic disadvantage or rurality.

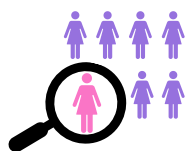
Breast cancer screening participation



Methods at a glance

Analyses compared breast screening participation for women using mental health services with other women.

>1 million women aged 50-74 years



34,000 women using mental health services

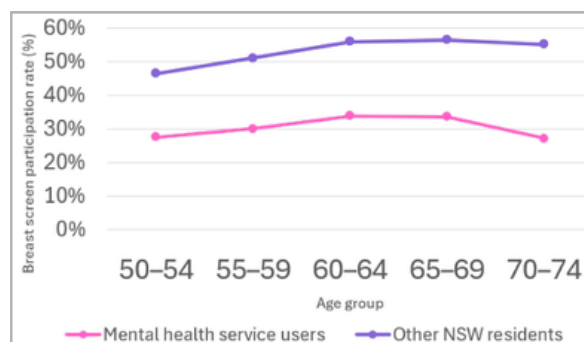
NSW population data linked across:

- BreastScreen NSW
- Hospital mental health services
- Community mental health services

Key findings

Mental health service users are **40%** less likely to participate in the free BreastScreen service (*Incidence rate ratio ≤ 0.59*).

Around **7,000** fewer women received breast screening than would be expected relative to the general population.



Key issues → Practical recommendations

Preventive healthcare inequities persist

→ Support women using mental health services to access breast screening

Inequities emerge early in adulthood

→ Embed proactive physical health screening and prevention

Mental health care should include physical health prevention

→ Embed cancer screening discussions and referrals into mental health services

Earlier detection improves outcomes

→ Strengthen links between mental health, primary care and screening

Greatest disparity:

Screening gaps were largest among women aged over 60 years, and those in socioeconomically advantaged areas.

Potential impact:

The screening gap has important consequences: One in every 107 screenings will avert a death if follow-up treatment is provided.

Read more

Visit the Equally Well Australia website for more information and resources.



Author's conclusion

“ Universal screening programs such as BreastScreen need additional strategies - women who use mental health services should be a priority group. ”