



FACTSHEET

October 2020

Mental illness and chronic conditions

People with mental illness are dying prematurely

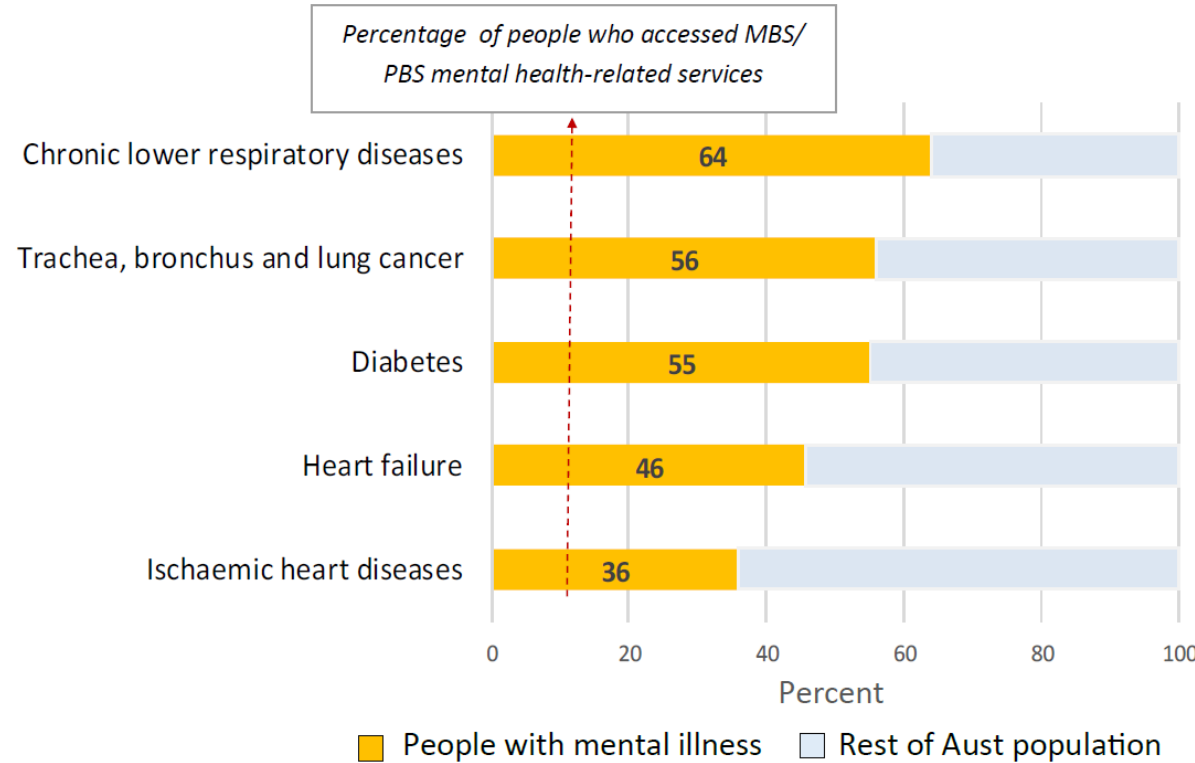
- Over 10,000 people with mental illness die prematurely from chronic diseases each year. That is equivalent to 28 people every day.¹
- Chronic diseases cause 10 times more premature deaths than suicide for people with mental illness.² These include heart disease and stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes, chronic kidney disease and respiratory conditions.
- There is an unacceptable life-expectancy gap of up to 15 years between people with mental illness and people in the general population.³ Their mental health conditions are treated but their physical health is neglected.
- Eighty percent of people with mental illness also have a serious physical health condition,⁴ which is often not diagnosed or treated.
- People with mental illness not in full-time employment and from lower socio-economic areas are up to five times more likely to die prematurely.

Risk factors and access disparities for people with mental illness

- Many chronic diseases share modifiable risk factors like smoking, overweight and obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar.
- People with mental illness have much lower rates of health service access for screening, treatment, and surgical interventions.
- People with a mental illness have a much higher prevalence of certain risk factors compared to the general population:
 - Women with mental illness are nearly 70 percent more likely to smoke. Men are nearly 40 percent more likely to smoke.⁵
 - Women with mental illness are eight percent more likely to be inactive. Men with mental illness are 11 percent more likely to be inactive.⁶
 - Around one in three people with mental illness are obese, compared to around one in four people in the general population.⁷
 - In people with psychosis, obesity rates can be as high as 45 percent.⁸



People with mental illness are 2.4 times more likely to die prematurely from avoidable physical health conditions⁹



People with severe mental illness are particularly at risk compared to the general population¹⁰



Source: Equally Well Alliance Consensus Statement 2018

Much chronic disease burden could be prevented

- One in two Australians have a chronic disease. One in five Australians have multiple chronic conditions.¹¹
- Chronic diseases are the leading cause of premature death in Australia.¹² But nearly 40 percent of chronic disease burden could be prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors.¹³
- Nearly half of all potentially preventable hospitalisations are due to chronic conditions.¹⁴
- Four in five Australians with mental illness have a serious chronic disease.¹⁵ Over half (55 percent) have two or more coexisting chronic diseases.¹⁶
- In people with severe mental illness, almost 70 percent of early deaths due to heart disease are preventable.¹⁷
- Risk assessment and early detection could halt or delay the progression of chronic conditions and reduce avoidable complications and adverse outcomes.

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) is an alliance of Cancer Council Australia; Diabetes Australia; National Heart Foundation of Australia; Kidney Health Australia; and Stroke Foundation. Members work together to collectively support prevention, integrated risk assessment and effective management of chronic disease risk. www.acdpa.org.au

The Equally Well Alliance is a collective of people representing consumers, carers, professional colleges, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, Primary Health Networks, peak bodies, community managed organisations, private health providers and governments. www.equallywell.org.au

¹ Roberts R, Lockett H, Bagnall C, Maylea C, Hopwood M. Improving the physical health of people living with mental illness in Australia and New Zealand. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*. 2018;26(5):354-62.

² ABS. Mortality of people using mental health services and prescription medications. Analysis of 2011 data. Canberra: ABS; 2017.

³ Lawrence D, Hancock KJ, Kisely S. The gap in life expectancy from preventable physical illness in psychiatric patients in Western Australia: retrospective analysis of population-based registers. *BMJ*. 2013;346:f2539.

⁴ ABS. National Health Survey: Mental health and co-existing physical health conditions, Australia, 2014-15. Canberra: ABS; 2016.

⁵ Harris B, Duggan M, et al. Australia's mental and physical health tracker. Technical paper No. 2018-06. Australian Health Policy Collaboration. Aug 2018.

⁶ Keeping Body and Mind Together: Improving the physical health and life expectancy of people with serious mental illness. Melbourne. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. 2015

⁷ Harris B, Duggan M, et al. Australia's mental and physical health tracker. Technical paper No. 2018-06. Australian Health Policy Collaboration. Aug 2018.

⁸ Morgan VA, McGrath JJ, Jablensky A, Badcock JC, Waterreus A, Bush R, et al. Psychosis prevalence and physical, metabolic and cognitive co-morbidity: data from the second Australian national survey of psychosis. *Psychol. Med*. 2014;44(10):2163-76

⁹ ABS. Mortality of people using mental health services and prescription medications. Analysis of 2011 data. Canberra: ABS; 2017.

¹⁰ Equally Well Alliance 2018. Improving the physical health and wellbeing of people living with mental illness in Australia. <https://www.equallywell.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Equally-Well-National-Consensus-Booklet-47537.pdf>

¹¹ AIHW 2020. Australia's health 2020. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/chronic-conditions-and-multimorbidity>

¹² AIHW 2014. Australia's health 2014. CAT no. AUS 178. Canberra: AIHW.

¹³ AIHW 2019. Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2015. CAT no. BOD 22. Canberra: AIHW.

¹⁴ AIHW 2019. Potentially preventable hospitalisations in Australia by age groups and small geographic areas, 2017–18. Cat. no: HPF 36. Canberra: AIHW.

¹⁵ ABS 2016. National Health Survey: Mental health and co-existing physical health conditions, Australia, 2014-15. Canberra: ABS.

¹⁶ AIHW 2017. Chronic Disease Comorbidity. Canberra: AIHW.

¹⁷ Cunningham, R., Poppe, K., Peterson, D., Every-Palmer, S., Soosay, I. & Jackson, R. 2019. Prediction of cardiovascular disease risk among people with severe mental illness: A cohort study. *PLoS one*, 14, e0221521.