

Influenza and vaccine equity



EQUALLYWELL

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

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.

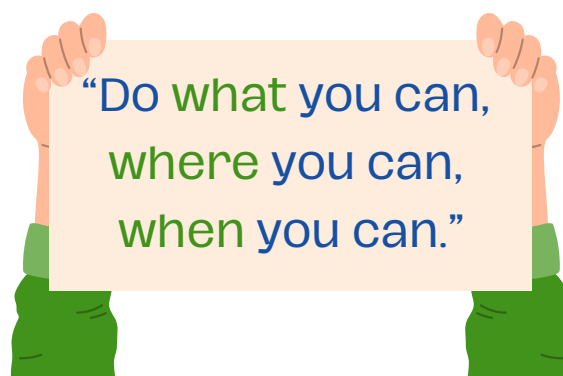
Activate your workplace

- **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

Links *[click or scan]*



[Unequally Unwell
Summary Report](#)



[Full Report](#)



[Full list of
references](#)

About Equally Well

Equally Well is a collective of over 100 organisations committed to the physical health of people living with mental illness. The Equally Well initiative is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.



[Equally Well](#)