

Health Disparities Among People With Serious Mental Illness

Carrie Cunningham, M.D., M.P.H., and Lisa B. Dixon, M.D., M.P.H.

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People with serious mental illness face glaring health disparities, with mortality rates two to three times higher than those of the general population. This disparity translates to life expectancies shortened by 10–28.5 years. Cardiometabolic factors, including diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and cardiovascular disease, are major drivers of this early mortality. These illnesses are both caused and compounded by smoking, lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, and social determinants that negatively affect the health of people with serious mental illness.

This collection begins with articles describing factors that affect the health and well-being of people with serious mental illness, including the prevalence of diabetes and obesity, high rates of smoking, and delays in seeking medical care. Subsequent articles highlight low rates of screening for cardiometabolic factors, communicable disease, and cancer among people with serious mental illness. Interventions to address these issues are highlighted, including smoking cessation efforts, involving peers to support patients with self-management in the Health and Recovery Peer Program, and group-based medical illness self-management with the Living Well initiative. The collection concludes with policy considerations to improve outcomes for people with serious mental illness, including a compelling argument for recognition of serious mental illness as a disparities category.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS

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