

In This Issue

Individuals diagnosed with a mental illness die 5-20 years earlier than those without mental illness. Some research suggests that this trend of increased mortality may be worsening over time and the gap in longevity may be widening. Data suggest that this hastened mortality is largely explained by preventable medical conditions and to a lesser degree, due to the effects of the mental illness itself. For example, those with mental illness have rates of cardiometabolic diseases twice those without mental illness. There are many pathways linking mental illness to downstream disease – many of which are preventable. An important pathway where targeted interventions should focus is in the area of health behaviors (e.g., alcohol, tobacco use, physical activity, dietary habits, sleep, and medication adherence).

In 2019, [The Lancet Psychiatry Commission](#) published *A Blueprint for Protecting Physical Health in People with Mental Illness* highlighting the modifiable pathways linking mental illness to physical disease to address health disparities between those with and without mental illness. This report particularly focused on health behaviors, the role of psychiatric medications, and integration of physical and mental health care with multidisciplinary and multi-level solutions.

In this issue of the *E4 Center's Hot Topics Newsletter*, we highlight the latest research that can pave the way for interventions to help close this gap in health and longevity in those with mental illness. Although we generally aim to highlight research with older adult samples, for the purposes of this newsletter, we chose to include studies with a broader age range for a variety of reasons. First “older adulthood” generally occurs earlier for those with mental illness due to premature mortality. In addition, prevention and intervention for many of the key areas highlighted in the Lancet Commission are generally best implemented early for the best outcomes throughout the lifespan.



Physical Health in Older Adults with Mental Illness

[Excess deaths from COVID-19 among Medicare beneficiaries with psychiatric diagnoses: Community versus nursing home](#) *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. January, 2023

Xu and colleagues examined data from over five million Medicare beneficiaries to determine the impact of psychiatric diagnoses (depression, anxiety, bipolar, schizophrenia) on excess deaths during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic. They also examined these outcomes among beneficiaries who live in the community and in nursing homes. Their results showed that excess deaths were greater for those with psychiatric conditions,

particularly schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Nursing home residents also experienced excess deaths during this time. However, this increased risk of pandemic excess mortality in those with psychiatric conditions was found in community-dwelling beneficiaries but not nursing home residents. Medical comorbidities and higher COVID-19 infection rates were two pathways identified that might explain the increased risk for mortality in beneficiaries with psychiatric diagnoses.

Association between antipsychotic medication and clinically relevant weight change: meta-analysis *BJPsych Open*. January, 2023

While it is well-established that antipsychotics are associated with weight gain, Campforts and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis to determine the associations between antipsychotic medications, clinically significant weight gain (CSWG; $\geq 7\%$ weight gain) and clinically-significant weight loss (CSWL; $\geq 7\%$ weight loss). Their meta-analyses included 201 studies and found that all the antipsychotic medications studied were associated with CSWG. Data were too limited to draw conclusions about CSWL. CSWG was more pronounced in those who were prescribed an antipsychotic for the first time, suggesting a particularly ripe timeframe for targeting interventions.

Physical function assessment of older veterans with serious mental illness *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. September, 2023

The Gerofit program is a national outpatient exercise program for veterans age 60 and older, delivered at Veteran's Health Administration sites. Browne and colleagues examined baseline clinical data from this program to determine the physical function among participating veterans with serious mental illness (SMI). They found that older veterans with SMI had poorer results on functional performance tests of endurance, strength, and mobility compared to veterans without SMI diagnoses. These findings add to accumulating evidence that mental illness can affect physical activity and sedentary behavior, both contributors to downstream health consequences.

Association between the use of wearable devices and physical activity among US adults with depression and anxiety: Evidence from the 2019 and 2020 Health Information National Trends Survey *Cureus*. May, 2023

Okobi and colleagues examined the relationship between wearable device use (such as fitness trackers) on physical activity in 2026 adults enrolled in the Health Information National Trends Study who had self-reported depression and anxiety. They found that 33% of participants reported wearable device use. Overall, only about a third of participants in the sample met the national weekly recommendations for physical activity and strength and resistance exercise. Use of wearable devices was not associated with meeting these national weekly recommendations. Frequency of wearable device use also did not seem to be associated with general physical activity levels. These findings suggest that those with depression and anxiety might need more tailored interventions to encourage the use of wearable devices to best meet physical activity goals.

Examining place-based neighborhood factors in a multisite peer-led healthy lifestyle effectiveness trial for people with serious mental illness *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. April, 2023

Salvo and colleagues aimed to explore the relationships between neighborhood characteristics and health behaviors including healthy eating and physical activity in those with SMI. They analyzed baseline data from an obesity randomized controlled trial for low-income, minority adults with SMI living in two different cities. They found that several place-based neighborhood characteristics (including availability of public parks, bike lanes, convenience stores, walkability indices, hospital density, and social environmental characteristics) differed significantly between the two study cities. Several neighborhood characteristics were associated with baseline healthy eating and physical activity. These results underscore the importance of considering neighborhood characteristics when designing health behavior interventions for this population, as such factors can affect the effectiveness of the studied interventions. These results also have implications for urban planning and health policy.

Barriers and facilitators to the participation and engagement of primary care in shared-care arrangements with community mental health services for preventive care of people with serious mental illness: a scoping review *BMC Health Services Research*. September, 2023

Parker and colleagues conducted this scoping review to determine barriers and facilitators to participation and engagement of primary care in shared-care arrangements for delivering prevention services within community mental health services for those with SMI. Their review included seven studies that met inclusion criteria. Factors that facilitated participation included "good fit" with the organization and collaboration opportunities, specific roles promoting communication and coordination to assist with navigating patients through appointments, multidisciplinary teams, an access to shared medical records. Barriers identified included lack of provider willingness, motivation, and confidence with tasks, lack of physical structures to produce capacity, poor alignment of funding or incentives, reduced ability to share information, and challenges engaging people with SMI in services.

Written for the E4 Center by Susan Buehler, PhD

Upcoming Events

You can register for these events or learn more by going to our website at e4center.org/calendar

NOV

Alcohol, Cannabis, and Other Substance Misuse Among Older Adults: New Findings to Inform Prevention and Interventions

November 15

@ 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm CST