

Using New Zealand data to understand health inequities

The physical health of people with mental health problems

Primary health services are key to supporting people with co-existing mental and physical health problems.

Depression and anxiety are common mental health problems that affect 1 in 5 people each year and have a high prevalence amongst Māori and Pasifika people.¹ These common mental health problems are associated with an **increased risk of long-term physical health problems.**²

Contemporary data from the New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS) shows for people diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety, the risk of having a stroke, chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, and arthritis is about twice as high, compared to people without a diagnosis.² There may also be a higher risk of diabetes.³

Despite having a greater need for health services, people with a diagnosis of anxiety and depression experience **greater challenges accessing primary health services due to transport and costs.**⁴ They also report less positive experiences with general practitioners compared to others.⁴

Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui (Te Pou) has undertaken an analysis of recent data from the NZHS to better understand the physical health needs of people who experience mental health problems. Figures 1 and 3 present adjusted associations (odds ratios) for people diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety sometime in their life. Analyses are adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Odds ratios greater than one suggest people diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety are more likely to experience the physical health issue examined, compared to people without a diagnosis. The total sample of the NZHS 2015/2016 included 13,719 people living in the community aged 15 years and over.

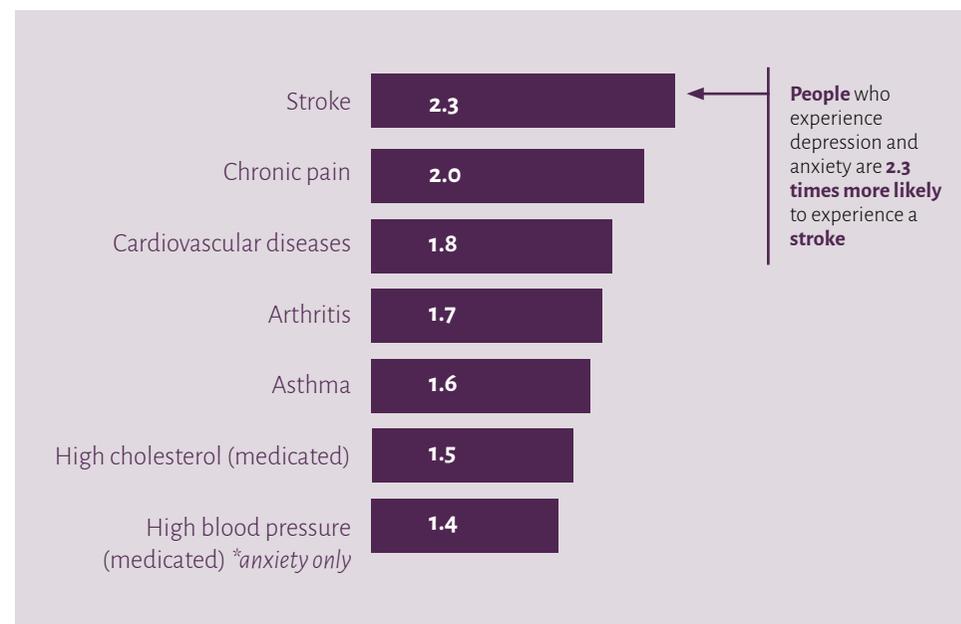


Figure 1: Increased risk of physical health problems amongst people diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety, based on 2015/2016 NZHS data.²

What can you do to improve people's wellbeing?

Improving the health of people who experience mental health problems requires a **multi-level approach**⁸ that considers the importance of policies and systems, clinical practice, and workforce development. Figure 2 provides some examples of actions that can be taken.

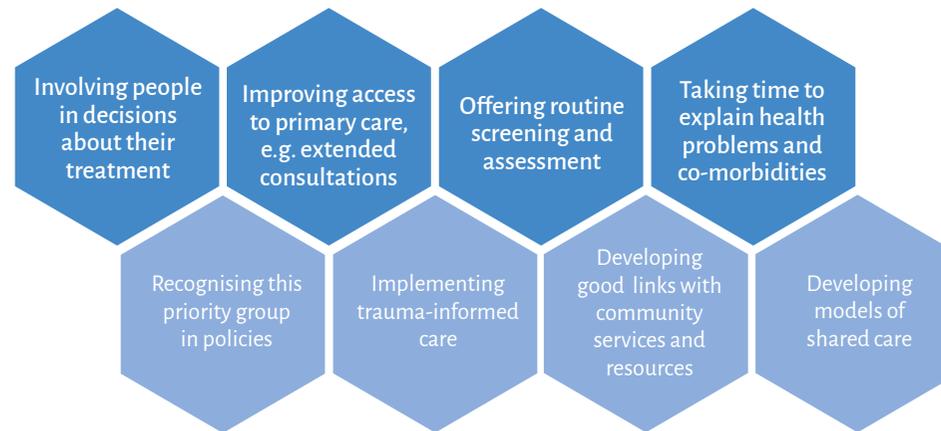


Figure 2: Priority actions for improving the health of people who experience mental health problems.

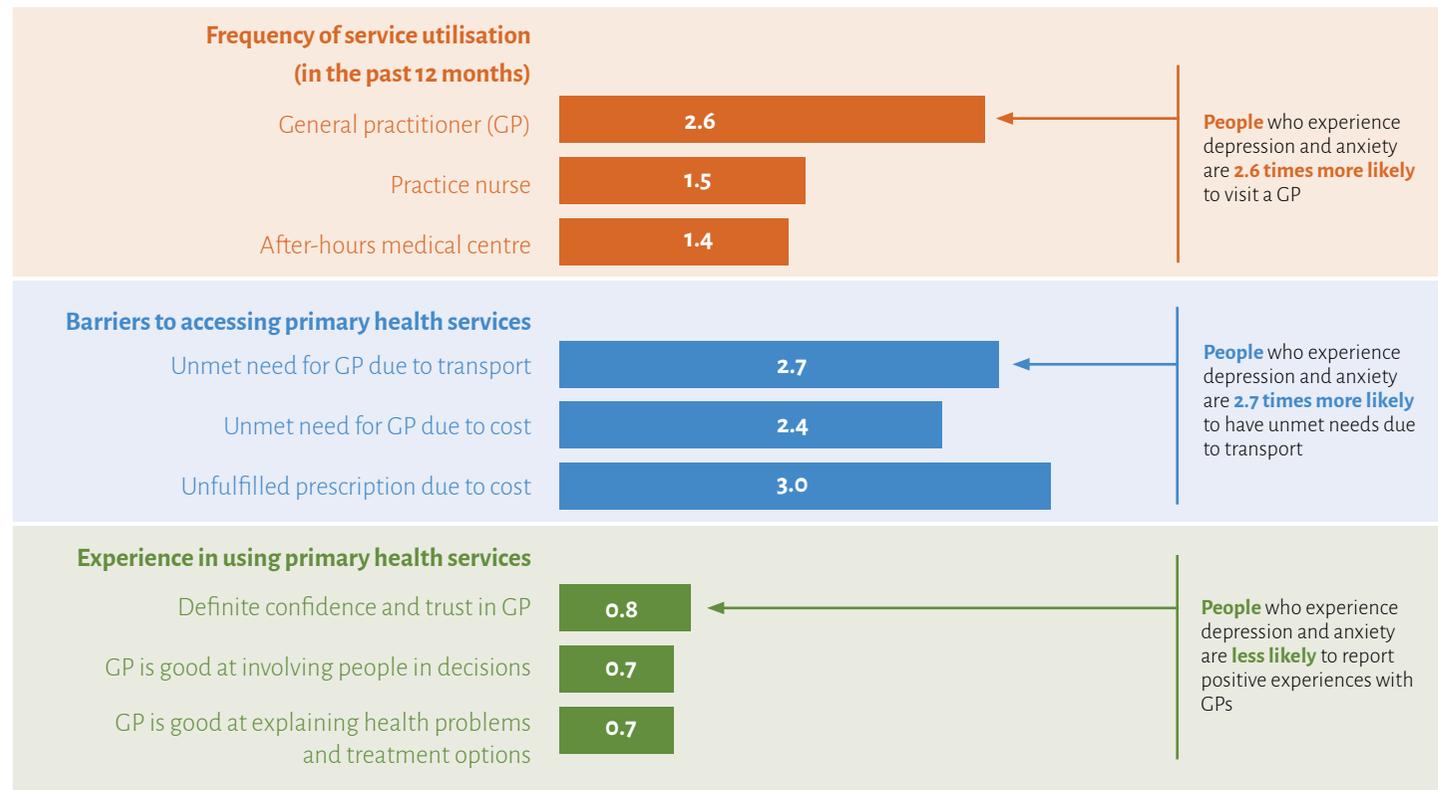


Figure 3: Utilisation of primary health services amongst people diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety, based on 2015/2016 NZHS data.⁴

New Zealand Health Survey

NZHS is a large national survey of more than 13,000 people living in the community undertaken each year.

The survey highlights contemporary health equity issues which can help services better understand the health needs and experiences of people, as well as the impact of policies and initiatives set up to address disparities.

For more information about this analysis read the findings published in the [Journal of Primary Health Care](#), or other journal publications referenced below.

Making better use of existing data sets to inform future planning

References

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