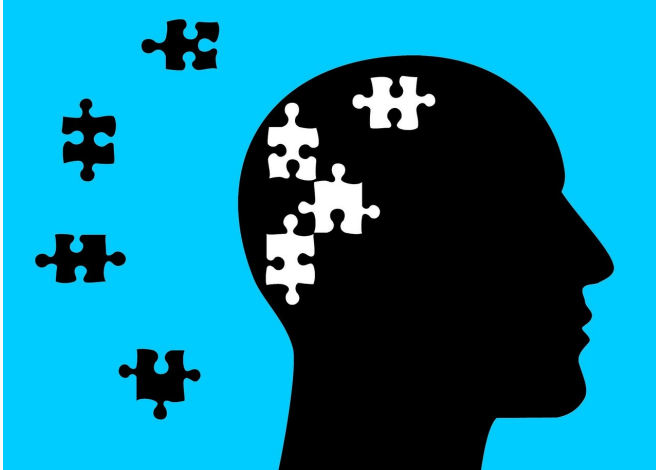


# Researchers call for people with mental illness to have top priority for COVID-19 vaccine

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People with serious mental illness should be given priority access to a COVID-19 vaccine when one becomes available, say University of Queensland researchers.

Studies show people with [serious mental illness](#) are more likely to be infected by the COVID-19 virus and have higher rates of hospitalization due to medications, poorer general health, reduced access to medical care, lower socio-economic status, overcrowding, smoking and obesity. Once infected, they are also more likely to have poorer health outcomes and higher death rates compared with the general population.

Professor Dan Siskind from UQ's Faculty of Medicine Princess Alexandra Hospital Southside Clinical Unit said that this vulnerable group should be prioritized when the vaccination roll-out begins.

"People with serious mental [illness](#) should be

included with other priority groups, including Indigenous people, [older adults](#) and people with physical health comorbidities if a vaccine is developed that is deemed safe and effective," Dr. Siskind said.

"Evidence from existing vaccination programs suggests that there could be challenges in vaccinating these groups at both an individual and public health level.

"People with serious mental illness may not be as willing to adopt preventative measures, such as vaccinations.

"They may also be less likely to see vaccines as safe, and more likely to believe that the vaccine itself can cause the illness."

Dr. Siskind suggests that using existing physical health programs and administering vaccinations from mental health clinics may help increase uptake.

"Mental [health](#) professionals are uniquely skilled to help educate people with serious mental illness, and can deliver individualized and clear messaging based on the barriers to vaccination," he said.

"They can play a key role in advocating for priority access to a COVID-19 vaccination for those with serious mental illness, as well as facilitating its uptake."

UQ's Professor Steve Kisely and Dr. Nicola Warren were co-authors on the study.

This research is published in *JAMA Psychiatry*.

**More information:** Nicola Warren et al. Maximizing the Uptake of a COVID-19 Vaccine in

People With Severe Mental Illness, *JAMA Psychiatry* (2020). DOI: [10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.4396](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.4396)

Provided by University of Queensland

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