



Experiences of people with multimorbidity

Chronic conditions, such as arthritis, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, are an important global, national and individual health concern. They cause substantial ill health, disability, premature death, and disease burden. Many people with chronic conditions do not have a single condition, they have **multimorbidity**—the presence of 2 or more chronic conditions at the same time. Living with chronic conditions can affect a person's quality of life, work and social life, and finances. The impact may be even greater for people living with multimorbidity.

This fact sheet presents some key findings from the web report *Chronic condition multimorbidity*.

Who is more likely to have multimorbidity?

Ten chronic conditions* were selected for this report because they are common, pose significant health problems, and have been the focus of ongoing national surveillance efforts. In 2017–18, an estimated 20% of Australians (4.9 million people) self-reported 2 or more of the 10 chronic conditions.

Females and older people were more likely to have multimorbidity:

- Females were more likely to have multimorbidity than males in all age groups examined.
- Across all ages, 23% of females had multimorbidity compared with 18% of males.
- 1 in 2 people aged 65 and over had multimorbidity (51%) compared with around 1 in 8 people aged 15–44 (12%) (Figure 1).

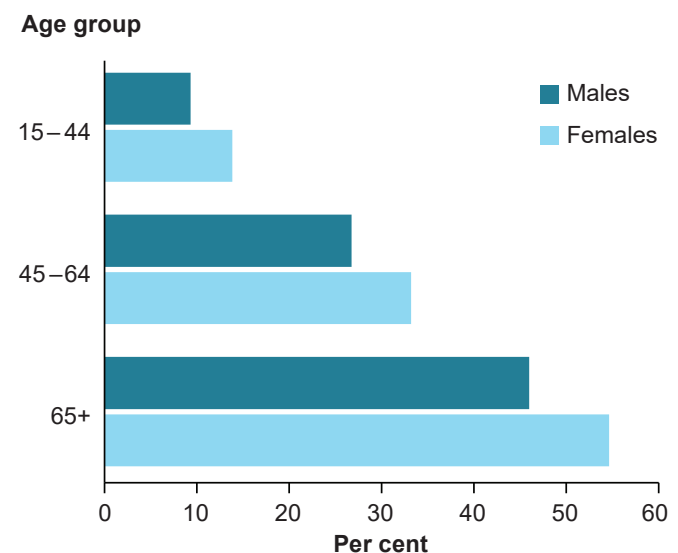
In addition to measuring prevalence, it is possible to identify pairs of chronic conditions that occur together in people with multimorbidity and test the strength of association between them. When analysing people aged 45 and over (the majority of people with multimorbidity) most pairs of chronic conditions were significantly associated, indicating they occurred together more often than would be expected by chance. The 3 most strongly associated combinations of 2 chronic conditions were asthma with COPD, diabetes with chronic kidney disease and selected cardiovascular diseases with chronic kidney disease.

*Arthritis, asthma, back problems, cancer, selected cardiovascular diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes (including types 1 and 2), chronic kidney disease, mental and behavioural conditions (including mood disorders, alcohol and drug problems and dementia), and osteoporosis.

Quick facts

- **1 in 5** (20%) of Australians had multimorbidity in 2017–18
- **Females** and **older people** are more likely to have multimorbidity
- **Half** of people (50%) aged 18 and over with multimorbidity had a limitation or restriction in everyday activities
- People with multimorbidity are less likely to work (**2 in 3**, 67%) than people with no chronic conditions (4 in 5, 83%)

Figure 1: Prevalence of multimorbidity, by age group and sex, 2017–18



Multimorbidity can negatively affect many aspects of life

Living with multimorbidity can have physical, emotional, social, financial, and lifestyle impacts. Compared with adults with no chronic conditions and after adjusting for age, adults with multimorbidity were less likely to be working (67% compared with 83%), and more likely to:

- live in the lowest 2 socioeconomic areas (45% compared with 34%).
- have a restriction or limitation in everyday activities (50% compared with 7.9%).
- have poor self-assessed health (32% compared with 5.3%).
- experience high or very high psychological distress (35% compared with 4.3%).

Complex multimorbidity is even more likely to negatively affect many aspects of life

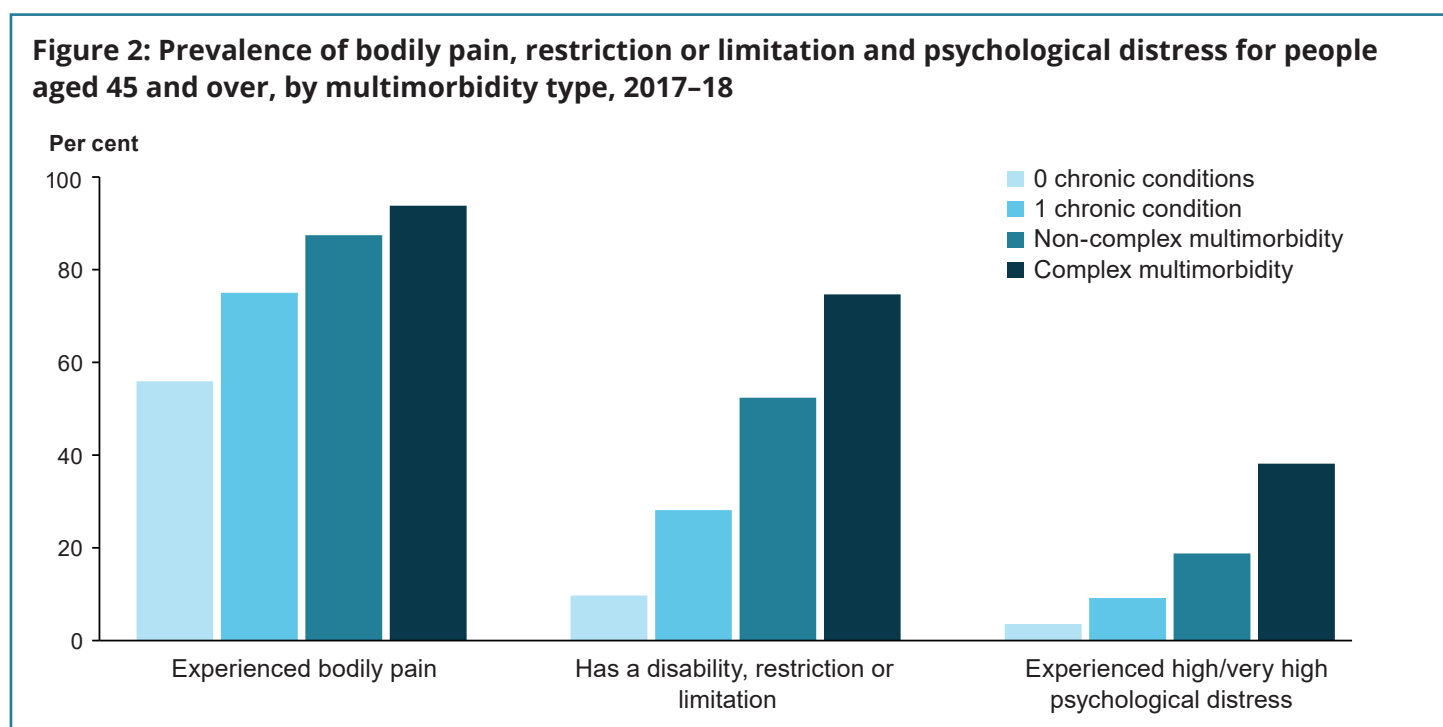
Multimorbidity is not the same for everyone. A person's experience of multimorbidity may be different if they have a higher number of chronic conditions and they affect different **body systems** (groups of organs and tissues working together to perform specific functions). For example, if a person has two chronic conditions that both affect the musculoskeletal system, they may be able to access treatments from a single health care provider. On the other hand, if a person has 3 chronic conditions affecting different areas of the body (for example, back problems, asthma and a mental health condition), their symptoms may be more difficult to manage or need more complex care, such as involving multiple specialists.

This section explores two multimorbidity types in people aged 45 and over:

- **Non-complex multimorbidity**, 2 or more chronic conditions affecting no more than 2 body systems
- **Complex multimorbidity**, 3 or more chronic conditions affecting 3 or more body systems.

Females aged 45 and over were more likely to have multimorbidity than males (41% compared with 34%). This difference was primarily due to the larger proportion of women with non-complex multimorbidity; 29% of women and 23% of men had non-complex multimorbidity while 12% of women and 11% of men had complex multimorbidity.

People with complex multimorbidity were more likely to experience bodily pain, disability, restriction or limitation in everyday activities, and high or very high psychological distress (Figure 2). Less than 1 in 2 (47%) people with complex multimorbidity aged 45–64 had worked in the previous week, compared with 4 in 5 (82%) people with no chronic conditions.



For more information, see the full report [Chronic condition multimorbidity](#).