

New research shows one in four chronically ill Australians is skipping healthcare because of high costs

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Dr Emily Callander, Senior Research Fellow in Health Economics at James Cook University said the situation was significantly worse in Australia than in Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany.

"It's particularly worrying because these are people with [chronic illnesses](#), not just people with a sniffle," she said.

Dr Callander, from JCU's Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine (AITHM), said people with mental health conditions were particularly affected.

"Over 40% of people with depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions stated that they skipped healthcare treatment because of the cost."

The study also found that more than one-third of people with asthma, emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) could not afford the treatment they needed.

Dr Callander said this was the first time comparisons had been made to estimate the relative amount of out-of-pocket expenditure between people with certain health conditions and people without a health condition.

"It's also unique because we looked at all of Australia rather than just specific ailments," she said.

The researchers found adults with asthma, emphysema and COPD had 109% higher household out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure than those with no health condition.

Adults with depression, anxiety and other [mental health conditions](#) had 95% higher household out-of-pocket expenditure. Dr Callander said there were clear implications for government policy.

"Successive federal governments have talked about increasing out-of-pocket costs. It shows the importance of these discussions and that in the back of our mind, we should always consider the implications for access."

JCU's Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine, the Bureau of Health and the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity conducted the study.

Other findings:

- Individual stroke survivors reported spending an average of AU\$1110 per year on healthcare; out-of-pocket expenditure ranged from AU\$0 to \$32,411 in the 12 months following their stroke.
- The mean out-of-pocket expenditure directly attributable to arthritis was AU\$1513 per year, with a range of AU\$49-\$20,527.
- The research team said people with chronic health conditions in Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland were all significantly less likely to skip healthcare because of cost than were people with a chronic condition in Australia.

- Despite this, people in the United States with a chronic condition were twice as likely to miss out on healthcare because of cost than people in Australia.

More information: Emily J. Callander et al, Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure and chronic disease ? do Australians forgo care because of the cost?, *Australian Journal of Primary Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1071/PY16005](https://doi.org/10.1071/PY16005)

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