

# Premature deaths from treatable diseases may be linked to lack of primary health care, study finds

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A new study on premature deaths in Aotearoa New Zealand has found a significant number of people who died from diseases that can be

successfully treated had not been enrolled with a primary health care (PHC) provider.

The study analyzed data on the deaths of people aged under 75 in the period from 2008 to 2017, says Pushkar Silwal, the lead author and a researcher at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.

"About 56,000 deaths in this period were from conditions that could have benefitted from health care treatment. However, about 5,000 of those who died weren't enrolled with a PHC provider—meaning they were missing out on GP care and other [health care services](#) available from these providers," Mr. Silwal says.

"We found people who weren't enrolled with a PHC provider had a 39% higher chance of dying early, compared with those who were enrolled."

Young adults, Māori, Pacific people, and those living in the most deprived areas were the least likely to be enrolled and therefore the least likely to be getting these health care services, he says.

The findings suggest [premature deaths](#) could be reduced if [primary health care](#) services were made much more accessible to these groups, says Dr. Mona Jeffreys, a co-author of the study and senior research fellow at the University's Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora—Health Services Research Center.

"We know being enrolled in a PHC means people have the chance to get access to preventative care and it also provides better continuity of care. Significant gains could therefore be made in health equity if primary care was accessible to everyone," she says.

The study is published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** Pushkar Silwal et al, Association between enrolment with a Primary Health Care provider and amenable mortality: A national population-based analysis in Aotearoa New Zealand, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0281163](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0281163)

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