

Why we need to act...now!

One of the strongest and best-known trends in Australia's health has been the marked and steady increase in bodyweight over the past few decades. Our obesity level puts us squarely among the 'worst' third of OECD countries. **The rise in overweight and obesity has occurred among Australian males and females of virtually all ages. Many experts are concerned about the effect this may have on our rates of diabetes, heart disease and other disorders, perhaps even on our life expectancy.** Based on measured height and weight in 2007–08, 25% of children aged 5–17 years were overweight or obese and this rose to 61% of adults.

Despite some notable exceptions, such as our obesity level and our infant mortality rate, we are mostly in the best third of countries around the world. And we are close to the very best rankings in areas such as life expectancy, the death rate from stroke and adult smoking rates. Also, *Australia's health2010* shows that our rankings for 23 of the measures were better than they were 20 years earlier. One of several possible reasons for an increase in kidney disease is that it is a common complication of diabetes, and levels of diabetes are known to be rising.

Type 2 diabetes may not be the only major form of the disease that is on the rise. Type 1 is the auto-immune form that begins mainly in childhood and young adulthood. Its incidence in Australia is being tracked through a national register run by the AIHW. **Between 2000 and 2007 the register found an increase of 30% in the rate of new Type 1 cases among children aged under 15 years.** The increase was in line with international trends and some earlier Australian studies. Australia's Type 1 incidence among this age group has been estimated as the sixth highest among OECD countries in 2010.

A growing problem in older age is dementia. Numbers are expected to rise markedly as the population grows and more and more Australians reach advanced old age. **Over 200,000 Australians are estimated to have dementia in 2010, with the number projected to more than double over the next 20 years.** Dementia imposes a serious burden of disease for those affected, with severe levels of disability.

Overall death rates vary a lot across different groups. Indigenous people have almost twice the rate for Australia as a whole. **For the most disadvantaged fifth of Australians (the lowest socioeconomic status: SES), the rate is about 13% higher than the national rate and for those living outside capital cities it is around 8% higher.** On the other hand, the rate for overseas-born Australians is 6% lower than the national rate and for the most advantaged fifth (the highest SES) it is about 17% lower.

Overall death rates for Indigenous Australians show the general and large gap between their health and that of other Australians. Furthermore, Indigenous males and females have a considerably higher death rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts for a range of major disease groups, often a very much higher rate. The higher Indigenous rates ranged from being 20% higher for cancers/tumours to over 6 times as high for diabetes. It can also be seen that the higher Indigenous death rate is wide ranging, not just for a few diseases. **This adds up to an estimated life expectancy that for Indigenous males is about 12 years less than that of non-Indigenous males. For Indigenous females the corresponding gap is 10 years.**

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