

Some successes and changes are apparent



The first section of this report highlighted a few important areas which can only be seen as successes. In fact, despite all the problems and all the room for improvement, the general picture suggests there must be many successes occurring at many levels of the health system.

As *Australia's health 2010* points out in Chapter 9, however, it can be difficult knowing just how much credit to give directly to the health system as such and how much to the wider society. For example, how much of the fall in heart disease is due to greater health awareness among the public, so they are less likely to smoke and more likely to seek control of their blood pressure and cholesterol level? Or how much of the fall is due to treatment by doctors, nurses and others for patients in private practice and hospitals?

This section focuses on two areas for which treatment can take much, if not all, of the credit: survival from heart attack and survival from cancer. The section also presents a statistic, 'potentially avoidable deaths', that estimates the rate of premature deaths, avoided through prevention or treatment.

Surviving heart attacks better

People who have heart attacks appear to be having an increasingly better chance of surviving over the years. For those aged 40–90 years who had a heart attack in 2007, over 3 in 5 survived, compared with less than a half a decade before. Part of this trend, however, may be due to an increase in the diagnosis of milder heart attacks, as tests have become increasingly sensitive over time.

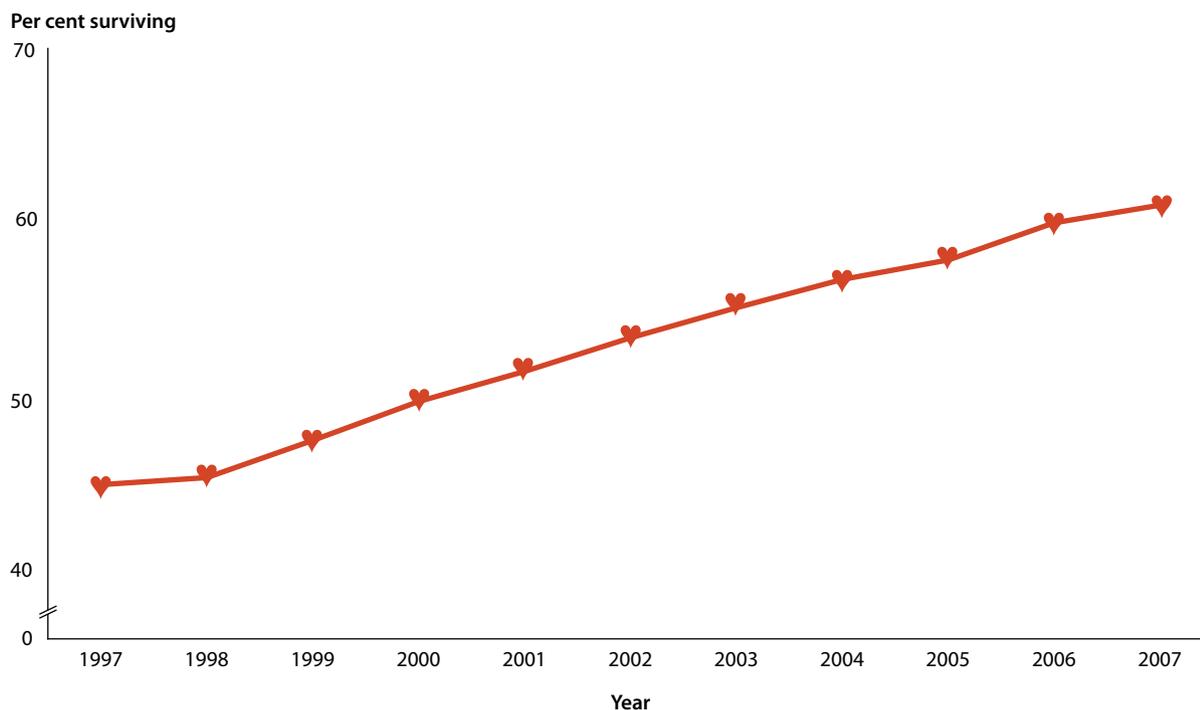
It is worth noting the significance of this finding and the fact that heart attacks are still often fatal. Coronary heart disease, of which heart attack is a major feature, was still the leading specific cause of death for both males and females in 2007. Although most of these coronary

deaths occur in older Australians, for males they are still the leading specific cause in the 25–64 year age group.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
chapters 4 and 9

Survival following heart attack: trend



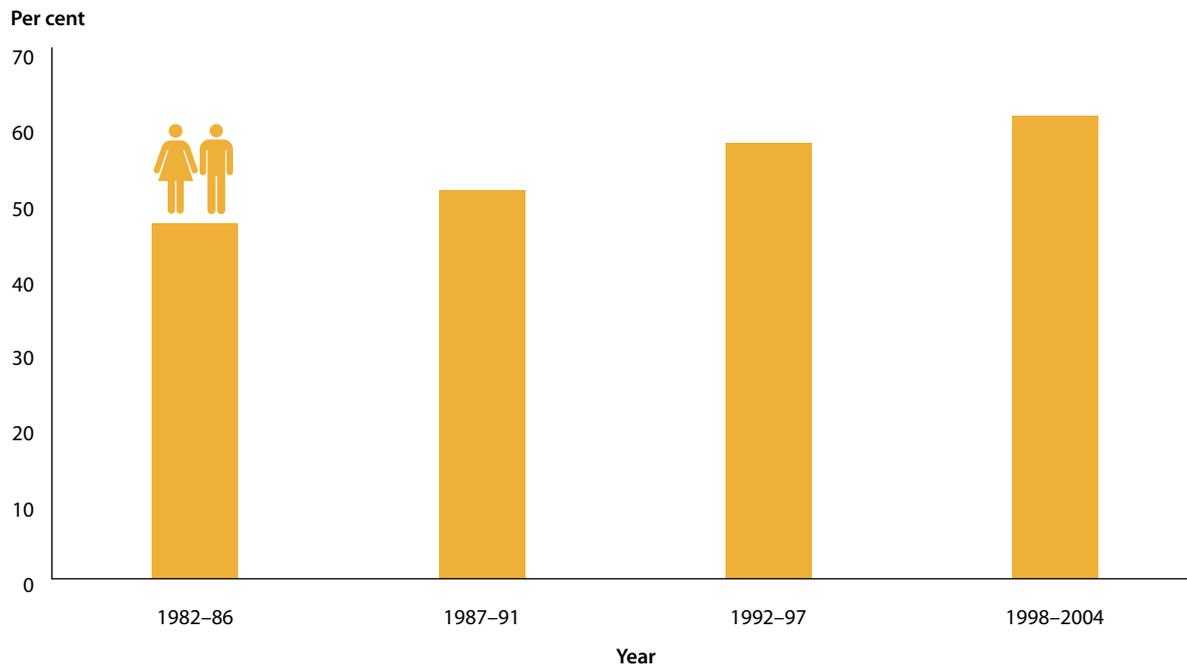
Cancer survival improving

Cancer is now the leading cause of Australia's national burden of disease and injury (see earlier) and many cancers can shorten people's lives. Over recent decades, however, there has been progressively better cancer survival. From the latest estimate the overall 5-year survival of those with cancer, relative to those without it, was 61% compared with 47% in the early 1980s.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
chapters 4 and 9

Survival of people diagnosed with cancer: trend



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Cancer survival: examples

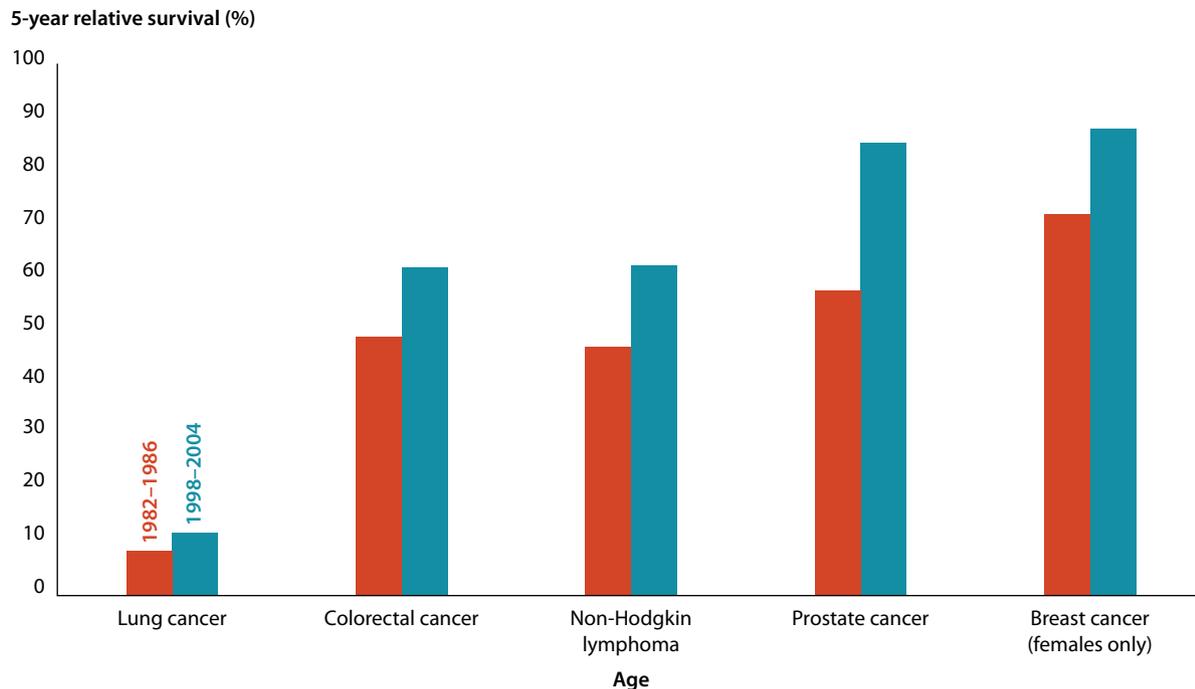
For people with two leading cancers, prostate and breast, there has been a large increase in survival over the period 1982–1986 to 1998–2004 (the latest period examined for survival). In 1998–2004, the 5-year relative survival for prostate cancer was over 85% and for breast cancer it was 88%. For those with colorectal cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma there have been similar gains over the two decades, with their relative survival standing at around 62–63% in 1998–2004.

For lung cancer, however, there has continued to be very poor improvement and relative survival, which stood at 12% in 1998–2004. Lung cancer still causes far more deaths than any other cancer.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 4

5-year relative survival for common cancers: trends



Realising our potential?

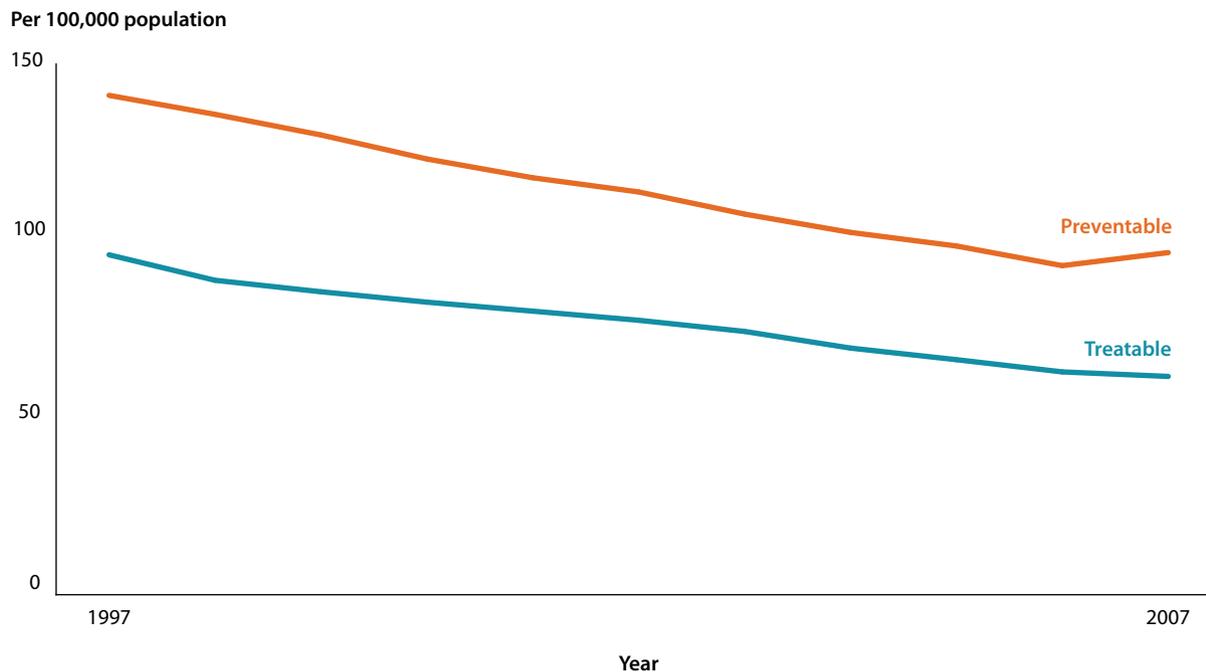
One way of assessing the health system's performance is to see if there are improvements over time in the rate of 'potentially avoidable deaths'. These are deaths of people under the age of 75 years from a set of conditions that are considered avoidable within the health system as it is now. These avoidable deaths are considered either 'preventable', such as those from HIV/AIDS, injuries or lung cancer; or 'treatable', such as those from asthma or appendicitis; or both, such as deaths from coronary heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Here, there has been a large improvement over the past decade in both 'preventable' death rates (a 40% drop) and 'treatable' ones (34%).

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 9

Potentially avoidable deaths: trends



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