



1.0 Overview

Good health is important—it influences not only how we feel, but also how we go about our everyday lives. Health can mean different things to different people, but is widely accepted to be much more than the presence or absence of disease. It incorporates dimensions of physical, mental and social wellbeing and is influenced by factors such as our:

- individual and psychological make-up
- lifestyle
- environment and cultural influences
- socioeconomic conditions
- access to quality health care programs and services.

Australians generally have good health and an effective health system. How do we know this? We use a range of measures, such as life expectancy, mortality and morbidity, to monitor Australia's health over time and to compare it with that of other countries. For instance, we use the Australian Health Performance Framework to assess the health of our population and the performance of our health system. Since 1988, *Australia's health* has reported biennially on national indicators across the domains of health status, determinants of health, and the health system. Trend assessment for indicators across these three domains show mixed results:

- We have seen some favourable trends in the health status domain, including a decline in the incidence rate of heart attacks, bowel cancer and the prevalence of severe or profound core activity limitation. However, there have been unfavourable trends too: hospitalisations for injury and poisoning have been increasing.
- The proportion of adults who are daily smokers, who are at risk from long-term harm from alcohol and who have an educational attainment of a non-school qualification or above have all been trending favourably over the last 10 years. However, not all news in the determinants of health domain is positive: the proportion of people who are obese and overweight has been increasing over the past 20 years.
- Assessment of the health system domain shows favourable progress for a number of indicators, including immunisation rates for 1- and 5-year-olds and potentially avoidable deaths. There has been no change over the last 10 years in some measures, such as wait times for emergency departments, however, the wait time for elective surgery has increased (an unfavourable trend).

Australia is a diverse nation. Its more than 25 million people have different backgrounds and lived experiences. In 2016, more than one-quarter (26%) of its people were born overseas, an estimated 3.3% (787,000) identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and about 71% (17.2 million) lived in *Major cities*.





Nationally, our life expectancy at birth has increased over time. Between 1890 and 2016, it rose for males from 47.2 to 80.4 years, and for females from 50.8 to 84.6 years. Australia now has the fifth highest life expectancy for males and the eighth highest for females compared with other member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

We are living longer lives, and those extra years are being lived in good health. A person can, however, have different states of health at different stages of their life. A measure called the health-adjusted life expectancy estimates, on average, how many years are lived in full health. It forecasts that males born in 2011 can expect to have 1.7 more years in full health than males born in 2003, while females can expect 1.2 more years.

While Australia performs well internationally on some measures of health, there is room for improvement on others. At 12%, Australia has one of the lowest rates of smoking among adults in the OECD, and a better than average rate of colon cancer survival, ranking third best. However, it has higher rates than the OECD average of alcohol consumption and obesity among people aged 15 and over.

The AIHW manages many important national health and welfare data collections. Evidence based on these data—together with health information collected by other government and non-government agencies—are used to inform research findings and policy decisions. Despite the breadth of health information available, there are gaps in our knowledge and opportunities to make better use of existing data, including through data linkage. Australia's health information and data environment is also changing rapidly. A coordinated, strategic approach to identify gaps, overlaps and priorities in health information would benefit policy, service delivery and research needs.

