

# But important challenges remain



Whatever the gains that have been achieved in Australia's health, there will always be challenges. Many of these challenges will relate to lack of progress in some areas of people's health, some to what are seen as failures in the health system, and others to the challenge of simply maintaining the progress achieved.

This final section begins with two areas where things appear to have worsened lately. It finishes by listing a few other examples that may be of interest, where there has been little or no evidence of improvement in recent times.

# Not preventing hospitalisations?

The main aim of primary health care is to help keep people healthy and well. From a systems perspective, it is also to help keep people out of hospital. Certain health conditions should normally be handled well enough to prevent people from needing to be admitted to hospital. They include vaccine-preventable infections, acute conditions such as ear infections or severe gastroenteritis, and chronic conditions such as diabetes, emphysema and their complications.

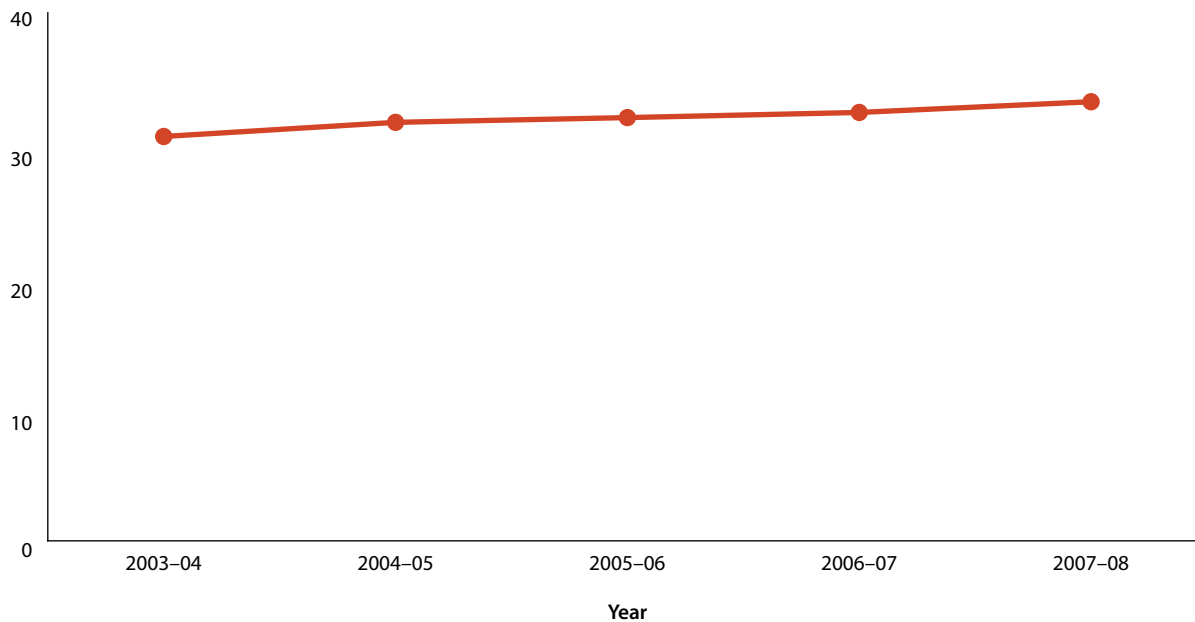
Hospitalisations for these conditions are known as potentially preventable hospitalisations and the overall rate appeared to increase between 2002–03 and 2007–08. It is also important to note that the rates increased with increasing remoteness and socioeconomic disadvantage.

## Find out more:

*Australia's health 2010*  
Chapter 9

## Potentially preventable hospitalisations: trend

Separations per 1,000



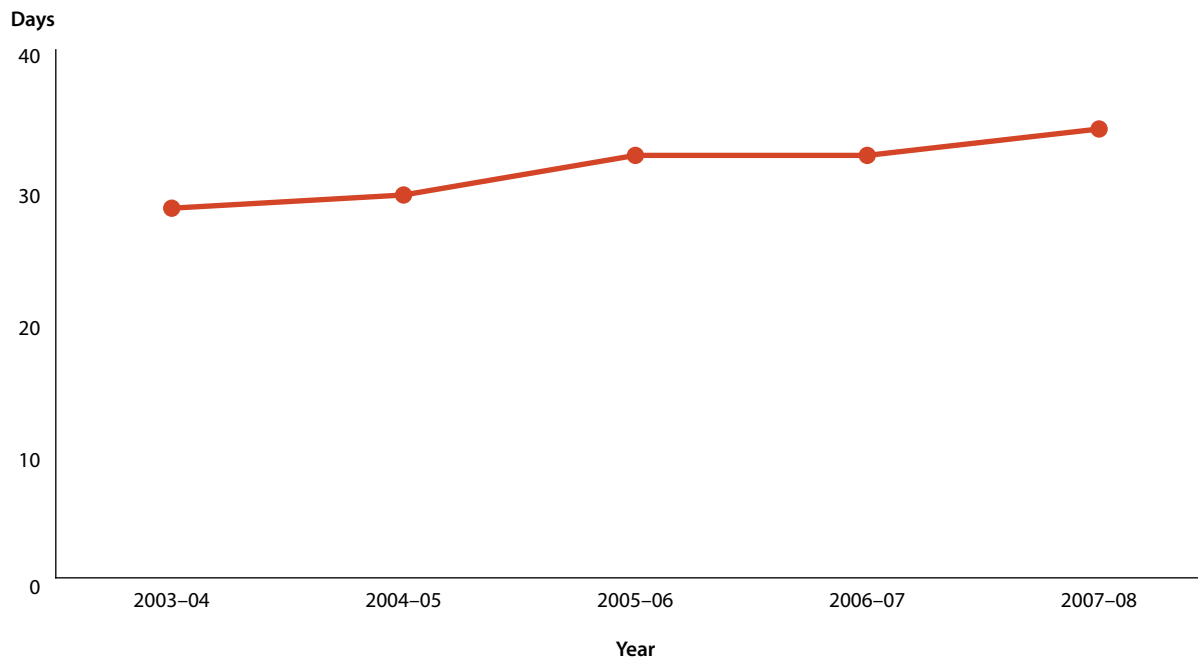
# Waiting longer for surgery

The subject of waiting times for elective surgery has long excited the interest of both the public and those who comment on health system performance. In the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08 the median waiting time for elective surgery in public hospitals rose from 28 days to 34 days. It was longest for people living in very remote areas and shortest for the least disadvantaged fifth of Australians. The shortest median waiting time in 2007–08 was for heart bypass grafts (14 days) and the longest was for total knee replacements (156 days). Surgery patients with cancer and other tumours waited a median 20 days.

## Find out more:

*Australia's health 2010*  
Chapter 9

## Median waiting times for elective surgery in public hospitals



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# A few more challenges

And finally, here is a very limited list from the challenges emerging from *Australia's health 2010*. The report shows there has been little or no improvement in recent years in the:

- level of unsafe sharing of needles among injecting drug users
- prescription rate by GPs of antibiotics for upper respiratory tract infections (they are usually due to viruses, for which antibiotics are ineffective)
- screening rates for breast and cervical cancer
- waiting times to receive care in hospital emergency departments
- percentage of adverse events treated in hospital.

**Find out more:**

*Australia's health 2010*  
chapters 7 and 9

All in all, Australia is a healthy nation. We do face challenges, however, and there is certainly scope for improvement.

*Australia's health 2010—in brief* presents key points and trends from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 12th biennial report card about the nation's health, *Australia's health 2010*.