

Highlights

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Cardiovascular disease continues to place a heavy burden on Australians...

- ◆ In Australia, cardiovascular disease kills more people than any other disease and creates enormous costs for the health care system. These issues are expected to become more acute over the next decades with the growing number of elderly Australians, among whom cardiovascular disease is most common.

in terms of deaths...

- ◆ Cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of death among Australians in 1998, accounting for 50,797 deaths (40% of all deaths).
- ◆ Coronary heart disease (mainly heart attacks) was the leading single cardiovascular cause of death, accounting for 27,825 deaths (22% of all deaths) in Australia in 1998.
- ◆ Stroke was Australia's second greatest single killer after coronary heart disease, claiming 11,982 lives in 1998 (9% of all deaths). It is the leading cause of long-term disability in adults.

hospitalisations...

- ◆ In 1998–99, there were 437,717 hospitalisations where cardiovascular disease was the principal diagnosis (7% of all hospitalisations).
- ◆ The average length of stay in hospital for cardiovascular conditions fell from 7.6 days in 1993–94 to 5.5 days in 1998–99.

health care costs to the community...

- ◆ Cardiovascular disease is the most costly disease for the health system in Australia. It was responsible for 12% (\$3.9 billion) of total recurrent health expenditure in 1993–94. Cardiovascular conditions consuming most health system resources were coronary heart disease (\$894 million), high blood pressure (\$831 million) and stroke (\$630 million).

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and future risks.

- ◆ For a 40-year-old, the risk of having coronary heart disease at some time in their future life is one in two for men and one in three for women.
- ◆ For a 45-year-old, the risk of having a stroke before age 85 is one in four for men and one in five for women.

The burden is most acute among certain Australians...

- ◆ Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples die from cardiovascular disease at twice the rate of other Australians. The difference is even greater among those aged 25–64 where Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' death rates were seven and ten times those of other Australian men and women, respectively.
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have one of the highest rates of rheumatic heart disease in the world, at 13.3 per 1,000 population in 1999. In comparison, among other Australians, the rate is 0.34 per 1,000.
- ◆ People in lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to die from cardiovascular disease compared with people in higher socioeconomic groups. In 1997, people aged 25–64 living in the most disadvantaged group died from cardiovascular disease at around twice the rate of those living in the least disadvantaged group.

but much of the burden caused by cardiovascular disease is preventable.

- ◆ In 1995, more than 10 million adult Australians (over 80% of the adult population) had at least one of the following cardiovascular risk factors: tobacco smoking, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, or overweight. About four in five men and three in four women had at least one of these risk factors.
- ◆ In 1998, almost 3.5 million (22%) Australians aged 14 years and over smoked on a regular basis.

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- ◆ More than 5.8 million adult Australians (43% of the population) did not undertake physical activity at the levels recommended to achieve a health benefit in 1999.
- ◆ In 1999–00, over seven million adult Australians (aged 25 and over) were overweight (BMI \geq 25). Of these over two million (20% of the population aged 25 and over) were obese (BMI \geq 30). The prevalence of both overweight and obesity has increased dramatically since 1980.
- ◆ In 1999–00, almost three million Australians (aged 25 and over) had high blood pressure or were on medication for that condition. High blood pressure increases the risk of cardiovascular disease by two to four times.
- ◆ In 1999–00, over six million Australian adults (aged 25 years and over) had blood cholesterol levels higher than 5.5 mmol/L, the upper limit recommended by the National Heart Foundation of Australia.

Favourable trends in some risk factors...

- ◆ The proportion of Australians (aged 25–64 years) with high blood pressure has declined since 1980.
- ◆ Smoking has declined since the 1970s, although the decline has slowed in recent years.
- ◆ The proportion of Australian adult males (aged 25–64 years) with high blood cholesterol has declined slightly since 1989.

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and advances in medical treatment and care should lead to improved outcomes.

- ◆ In 1998–99, there were 74,289 coronary angiograms performed. Coronary angiography gives a picture of the heart's arteries and is used to diagnose coronary heart disease.
- ◆ During 1998 there were 22,253 heart surgery procedures. By far the most common heart operation was coronary artery bypass grafting at 17,448 procedures.
- ◆ There were 18,094 coronary angioplasty procedures performed in 1998. Stents were inserted in 82% of these procedures. This represents a 31% increase in their use since the previous year.
- ◆ A total of 26,114 computerised tomography (CT) scans of the head were performed for stroke during 1998–99. During 1997–98 there were 4,515 carotid endarterectomies performed for stroke.
- ◆ More than 43.4 million prescriptions for cardiovascular drugs were dispensed in the community in 1998. This represents almost a quarter of all prescriptions.

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