

How do you measure up



## Chronic disease and its impact on Australia

### Fast facts

- There were 106,000 new cases of cancer diagnosed in 2006 and almost 40,000 deaths. Obesity increases the risk of postmenopausal breast cancer, cancer of the endometrium, the kidney, colon and oesophagus.<sup>1</sup>
- Type 2 diabetes is a leading cause of death and is estimated to affect 700,000 Australians. Complications include heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and gangrene leading to amputation.<sup>2</sup>
- Overweight and obesity affects approximately one in two Australian adults<sup>3</sup> and one in five children (4–17 years).<sup>4</sup>
- In 2004-05 some 62 per cent of males and 45 per cent of females were classified as being overweight (Body Mass Index [BMI] between 25.0 and 30.0) or obese (BMI over 30.0) (BMI calculated using self reported height and weight measurements).<sup>5</sup>
- Overweight and obesity prevalence is higher in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women in lower socioeconomic groups and women living in rural and remote areas.<sup>6</sup>
- High body weight contributes to deaths from diabetes, circulatory disease, cancer and other causes. Inactivity contributes to deaths from circulatory disease, diabetes and cancer.<sup>7</sup>
- The single greatest killer of Australians is cardiovascular disease (CVD) – covering all diseases and conditions of the heart and blood vessels. CVD affects more than 3.7 millions Australians, or one in every six people. It kills another person every 10 minutes. It accounts for 50,000 deaths in Australia every year.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) & Australasian Association of Cancer Registries (AACR) 2007. *Cancer in Australia: an overview, 2006*. Cancer series no. 37. Cat. no. CAN 32. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2008. *Diabetes: Australian facts 2008*. Diabetes series no. 8. Cat. no. CVD 40. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *National Health Survey 2004-05: Summary of results*. ABS cat.no. 4364.0. Canberra: ABS.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *National Nutrition Survey. Nutrient Intakes and Physical Measurements, Australia, 1995*. 4805.0 Canberra: ABS.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *National Health Survey 2004-05: Summary of results*. ABS cat.no. 4364.0. Canberra: ABS.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *Overweight and Obesity in Adults, Australia, 2004-05*. ABS cat.no. 4719.0. Canberra: ABS.

<sup>7</sup> Begg S, Vis R, Barker B, Stevenson C, Stanley L, Lopez AD. *The Burden of Disease and Injury in Australia 2003*. 2007, Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2001. *Heart, stroke and vascular diseases— Australian facts 2001*. AIHW Cat. No. CVD 13. Canberra: AIHW, National Heart Foundation of Australia, National Stroke Foundation of Australia (Cardiovascular Disease Series No. 14).

### Australian Better Health Initiative

A joint Australian, State and Territory government initiative.

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### What is chronic disease?

A chronic disease is a serious medical condition or illness that is long lasting or recurrent. It is defined as a disease which has lasted or is expected to last for at least six months. Some of the most common chronic diseases in Australia include:

- cardiovascular diseases (CVD)
- type 2 diabetes
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- cancer
- osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, and
- chronic kidney disease.

Four out of every five Australians are affected by at least one chronic disease<sup>9</sup>.

These diseases often come in clusters. For example type 2 diabetes can lead to heart disease, stroke and kidney problems.

### The impact of chronic disease

The World Health Organization (WHO) has noted that chronic diseases are the major cause of death and disability worldwide.<sup>10</sup> Australia reflects the global situation, with chronic diseases estimated to be responsible for nearly 80 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury<sup>11</sup>, and more than two thirds of all health expenditure.<sup>12</sup> These chronic diseases also have a disproportionate impact on some population groups, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

By addressing lifestyle risk factors for chronic disease, the impact of chronic diseases can be reduced, population health enhanced and health system sustainability improved. At the same time, the nation's productivity can be strengthened by ensuring that people are sufficiently healthy to remain active and productive participants in the workforce.

### Risk factors for chronic disease

There is general agreement that there is a common set of preventable risk factors for chronic disease. These are:

- unhealthy eating habits
- physical inactivity
- overweight and obesity
- tobacco use
- harmful alcohol use.

### Health consequences of unhealthy eating

Nutritious food is fundamental to good health and disease prevention. The significant health risks associated with poor nutrition include chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Poor nutrition also contributes to a variety of other health risk factors such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and overweight and obesity.

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2006. *Chronic diseases and associated risk factors in Australia, 2006*. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) (2005) *Preventing chronic disease: a vital investment: WHO global report*. Geneva: WHO.

<sup>11</sup> National Health Priority Action Council (NHPAC) 2006. *National Chronic Disease Strategy*, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2006. *Chronic diseases and associated risk factors in Australia, 2006*. Canberra: AIHW.

### **Health consequences of physical inactivity**

Regular physical activity reduces cardiovascular risk and improves levels of cardiovascular risk factors such as overweight and obesity, high blood pressure, low levels of HDL (the 'good' cholesterol) and type 2 diabetes. It also reduces the risk of osteoporosis and helps protect against some forms of cancer.

### **Health consequences of overweight and obesity**

For adults, the health problems and consequences of obesity are many and varied, including musculo-skeletal problems, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, sleep apnoea, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. Many of these health problems are preventable through a healthy and active lifestyle.

There is now strong evidence which shows that positive lifestyle behaviours such as eating well and being active can prevent or delay the onset of such chronic diseases.

**For information and tips go to**  
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