

# Introduction

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Young adulthood involves exploration of and steps toward independence, with varying levels of adult supervision, making this period unique in the lifespan. Two important contextual influences shape the health of young adults: a prolonged transition to adult roles and responsibilities, and the weakening of the safety net that supports adolescents and younger children.[1] These factors have important implications for health behaviours, health status, health service use and access, and social capital.

Australian governments at the state and commonwealth levels recognise that research efforts need to increase if the full health potential throughout the lifespan is to be realised. While there are data sources that provide information on the health of people aged 16-24 in Australia, including national and state health surveys, health studies, and administrative data collections, there is considerable potential for further analyses of these data sources.

Since 2001, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has conducted a triennial National Health Survey. Before that time, surveys were conducted in 1989-90 and 1995. Information on the survey's probabilistic sampling and calculation of prevalence estimates can be found elsewhere.[2]

The New South Wales Population Health Survey is a continuous survey using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). The survey covers the whole state population from birth upwards. The target sample is 12,000 persons a year.[3] Over the period 1997-2007, the total sample was 102,651 persons, of which 9,465 were aged 16-24 years.

This reports presents trends in the health of persons aged 16-24 years from the 1997-2007 New South Wales Population Health Survey. The health behaviours chapter includes: alcohol, fire safety in the home, nutrition, adequate physical activity, current smoking, smoke-free households, and smoke-free cars. This is followed by a chapter on health status, including: self-rated health, asthma, cardiovascular disease precursors (blood pressure and cholesterol), diabetes or high blood glucose, mental health (psychological distress), oral health, and overweight or obese. Next there is a chapter on health services including: private health insurance, difficulties getting health care, emergency department presentations, hospital admissions, general practitioner services, public dental services, and community health centres. Finally, there is a chapter on social capital, including: participation in the local community, trust and safety, and reciprocity and neighbourhood connectedness.

The health indicators in these chapters are presented in graphical and tabular form. Each indicator includes line graphs for socioeconomic status and region (urban or rural health areas). The table below the graph presents prevalence estimates for males, females and persons and includes the 95% confidence intervals (CI), which provides a range of values that contain the actual value 95% of the time. A wider confidence interval reflects less certainty in the estimate. If confidence intervals do not overlap then the observed estimates are significantly different. If confidence intervals overlap slightly the observed estimates may be significantly different but further testing needs to be done to establish that significance.

This report is available in PDF and HTML versions, which can be downloaded from the New South Wales Population Health Survey website at [www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/surveys/index.asp](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/surveys/index.asp). Further information about the New South Wales Population Health Survey, including previous survey results and methods, can be obtained from the website.

## References

1. Park M, Mulye T, Adams S, Brindis C, and Irwin C. The Health Status of Young Adults in the United States. *J Adolesc Health* 2006; (39):305-317. Available online at [www.jahonline.org](http://www.jahonline.org) (accessed 11 June 2008).
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *National Health Survey: Users' Guide*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistic, 2006. Available online at [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) (accessed 11 June 2008).
3. Centre for Epidemiology and Research. NSW Population Health Survey: Website. Sydney: NSW Department of Health, 2006. Available online at [www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/surveys/index.asp](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/surveys/index.asp) (accessed 11 June 2008).