

Introduction

Ageing is a privilege and an achievement. It is also a challenge that will effect every aspect of 21st century society. In all countries, measures to help older people remain healthy and active are a necessity not a luxury. In the developed world, the very old (age 80+) are the fastest growing population group. Women outlive men in virtually all societies by a ratio of 2:1.[1] In Australia, it is projected that the proportion of older people in the population will increase from 13 per cent in 2004, to 26 per cent in 2051.[2] 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 older people 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.[3]

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.[4] Over the period 1997-2007, the total sample was 102,651 persons of which 26,172 were aged 65 years and over.

This reports presents trends in the health of persons aged 65 years and over from the 1997-2007 New South Wales Population Health Survey. The health behaviours chapter includes: alcohol, cancer screening (colorectal), immunisation (influenza and pneumococcal), injury prevention (smoke alarms in the home), nutrition, and smoking (current smoking, smoke-free households, and smoke-free cars). This is followed by a chapter on health status, including: positive self-rated health, asthma (ever and current), cardiovascular disease precursors (blood pressure and cholesterol), diabetes or high blood glucose, urinary incontinence, injury (falls), mental health (psychological distress), oral health, hearing, and vision. 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 age groups, socioeconomic status, and remoteness quintiles. 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. Further information about the New South Wales Population Health Survey, including previous survey results and methods, can be obtained from the website.

References

1. World Health Organization. Ageing and life course. The world is fast ageing: have we noticed? Available online at www.who.int/ageing/en (accessed 27 June 2008).
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Health of older people in Australia: a snapshot, 2004-05.* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistic, 2006. Available online at www.abs.gov.au (accessed 27 June 2008).
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *National Health Survey: Users' Guide.* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistic, 2006. Available online at www.abs.gov.au (accessed 27 June 2008).
4. 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 (accessed 27 June 2008).