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Chief Health Officer's report reveals NSW residents living longer

NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, has announced the release of the *2008 Health of the People of NSW Summary Report* which reveals the State's residents are living longer and healthier lives.

"The Report demonstrates our health services and disease prevention strategies are keeping death rates from cardiovascular disease and cancer down and providing better protection to our children through vaccination," the Minister said.

"NSW has the lowest rates of cancer death, the lowest rates of heart disease and the lowest suicide rates on record coupled with a growing life expectancy ranking us third in the world.

"A newborn male in 2006 can expect to live to 79.3 years while a female has a life expectancy of 84.2 years. On average, boys and girls born today can expect to live 10 years longer than their parents.

"Longer lives are the result of reductions in death rates which have decreased by almost half over the past 30 years.

"Death rates from cardiovascular diseases including coronary heart disease and stroke have continued to decline significantly in the last 10 years," Mr Della Bosca said.

"This can be credited to success in reducing risk factors such as smoking, saturated fats in the diet and high blood pressure; as well as better medical and surgical care, resulting in increased survival after heart attack and stroke.

"During the past 10 years, death rates from the most common cancers - colorectal cancer, prostate cancer and breast cancer have also fallen significantly.

"This reflects the success in NSW of programs for early detection of cancer - such as the mammographic and cervical screening programs - as well as better treatments for cancer.

"There has been success with lung cancer too with death rates decreasing by almost 25 per cent in males since 1997.

"The Summary Report indicates that while deaths from lung cancer decreased in males, it has actually increased in females over the same period.

"This is because it takes many years to develop lung cancer and smoking rates in women have only been declining for the past 20 years or so," Mr Della Bosca said.

The Report also reveals emerging problems including childhood overweight and obesity.

Acting Chief Health Officer, Dr Kerry Chant, said childhood overweight and obesity had the potential to become one of the biggest public health issues during this century.

“If the current trends are not reversed, NSW will experience reductions in life expectancy of two to five years by the middle of this century,” Dr Chant said.

The Summary Report states that between 1997 and 2007, there was a significant increase in the proportion of people aged 16-24 years in NSW who were obese (from 4 per cent in 1997 to 8.7 per cent in 2007). This increase was mainly in young women.

“One of the consequences of the obesity epidemic is an increase in diabetes,” she said.

“In 2007 in NSW, 7.8 per cent of men and 6.5 per cent of women reported having diabetes - a significant rise since 1997 when 5.2 per cent of men and 4.2 per cent of women reported having the disease.

“Further gains must also be made in the health of the Aboriginal population who still experience health problems at rates considerably worse than the community at large,” Dr Chant said.

The Summary Report presents information for more than 70 health indicators and details some big success stories for prevention and population health in NSW.

Other results show:

- In the past 20 years, death rates from motor vehicle crashes decreased by around two-thirds, drownings decreased by almost half and firearm injury fell by more than two-thirds.
- In 2006, immunisation rates in NSW children increased, with 91.7 per cent of young children now fully immunised - higher than the national average. These high rates have been accompanied by declines in notifications for diseases including rubella, whooping cough and measles.
- Communicable diseases to experience a marked decline in 2007 compared to previous years included Gonorrhoea - down 21 per cent on 2006 - and Hepatitis A at 65 cases - the lowest on record.

Mr Della Bosca said the State Government’s health programs would continue to promote healthy living, create healthy environments and enable individuals and communities to make healthy choices.

“These latest results show that over time, our health promotion programs are making a big impact. They focus on identifying health risks and developing ways to eliminate or reduce exposure to these risks.

“We are all aware of the pressures faced by our hospitals and emergency departments. Community health programs provide opportunities not only to improve the health of NSW families but also help reduce the demand for acute services,” he added.

The report can be found at: www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2008/chorep08_summary.html

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