

## Key messages from Report of the Chief Health Officer: Summary Report 2008

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**Life expectancy in NSW continues to increase.** In 2006 a newborn male could expect to live 79.3 years while a newborn female could expect to live 84.2 years. Australian longevity was third only to Japan and Switzerland in 2006.

On average, life expectancy in NSW has increased by 10 years in men and almost 11 years in women since a generation ago in 1968 – on average, boy and girls born in NSW can now expect to live 10 years longer than their parents.

Life expectancy for those NSW residents who have survived to age 65 years is now around 84 years for men and 87 years for women.

Longer lives are the result of reductions in death rates. The death rate in NSW has decreased by almost half over the last 30 years.

**Death rates continue to decline** significantly over the last 10 years for cardiovascular diseases including coronary heart disease and stroke.

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.

Over the last 10 years, death rates from the most common cancers - colorectal cancer, prostate cancer and breast cancer have 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—the death rate from lung cancer has decreased by almost 25% in males since 1997.

However, deaths from lung cancer actually increased in females over the same period. This is because it takes many years to develop lung cancer, and smoking rates in rates in women have only been declining for the last 20 years or so.

Reductions in death from injuries are one of the big success stories for prevention programs in NSW, which involve partnerships across several government agencies.

In the past 20 years, death rates from motor vehicle crashes decreased by around two-thirds , from drowning decreased by almost half and from firearm injury decreased by more than two-thirds.

**Hospitalisation rates have also decreased for unintentional poisoning and scalds** in young children. Injuries to motorcycle riders, falls, interpersonal violence and alcohol related injuries have increased.

In 2006, **immunisation rates in NSW children increased**, with 91.7% 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, pertussis (whooping cough) and measles.

In 2007, three cases of measles and 10 cases of meningococcal serogroup C were notified, the lowest numbers recorded for these vaccine preventable diseases since 1991.

Other **communicable disease rates have declined for some conditions**, there was a marked decline in 2007 compared to previous years included Gonorrhoea (down 21% on 2006) and Hepatitis A at 65 cases the lowest on record.

In 2007, 12,360 cases of sexually transmitted Chlamydia infections were notified – these notifications have risen sharply since 1999 and it is now the most frequently notified communicable disease in NSW.

Foremost among priorities for improving health is the poor health of **Aboriginal residents** of NSW, who have a life expectancy about 17 years less than for the general population.

The infant mortality rate for babies born to Aboriginal mothers was 7.5 per 1,000 births, over one and a half times the rate for all NSW babies.

Aboriginal adults are more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to smoke.

Compared with rates for non-Aboriginal people, **hospitalisation rates for Aboriginal people** in NSW are:

- **240% higher for alcohol-related conditions**
- **230% higher for chronic respiratory diseases**
- **210% higher for diabetes**
- **50% higher for injury and poisoning**
- **40% higher for cardiovascular diseases**

Work also needs to continue to reduce the use of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs in NSW.

In 2007, 21.9% of men and 15.4% of women were smokers. **Smoking rates have declined** by around 4% among men and 5.9% among women since 1998, but appear to be levelling out in men.

Smoking still causes more than 3,200 deaths in men and 1,800 deaths in women each year - more than any other health behaviour.

**Overall, risk alcohol drinking has declined.** In 2007, 37.2% of men and 27% of women reported drinking alcohol at levels that were risky for health. This is significantly down on rates of 10 years ago (1998) where risk alcohol drinking for males was reported as 50.4% and for females, 36.3%.

**Mental health remains a major health priority** in NSW. About one in six NSW secondary school students reported high levels of psychological distress in 2005.

**Suicide rates have been dropping** in NSW since 1997, but still, 493 people died by suicide in 2006. This was 5% fewer than in the previous year – males accounted for almost 80% of suicides in 2006.

In 2007, around 1% of NSW children aged 17 years or under were prescribed stimulant medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) – this was well below the estimated prevalence of ADHD.

### **The obesity epidemic in NSW continues.**

Childhood overweight and obesity has the potential to become one of the biggest public health issues over the coming century.

If the current trends are not reversed, NSW will experience reductions in life expectancy of two to five years by mid-century.

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% in 1997 to 8.7% in 2007). This increase was mainly in young women.

In 2007, well over half of men (58.8%) and approaching half of women (44.7%) were overweight or obese.

More than 62% of men and 48% of women were adequately physically active – this is an increase on 2003 data that revealed only half of adult males and 41% of adult females met adequate physical activity targets.

In 2007, only 7.2% of men and 13.8% of women ate adequate quantities of vegetables.

One of the consequences of the obesity epidemic is an increase in diabetes. In 2007 in NSW, 7.8% of men and 6.5% of women reported having diabetes a significant rise since 1997. when 5.2% of men and 4.2% of women reported having diabetes.

### **Hospitalisations for which diabetes was recorded as the principal diagnosis increased by more than 160% between 1989/90 and 2006/07.**

Population health programs aim to promote health, create healthy environments, enable individuals and communities to make healthy choices and reduce differences in health among population groups.

They focus on identifying health risks and developing ways to eliminate or reduce exposure to these risks.

Population health programs provide opportunities not only to improve health but also, through prevention, to reduce the demand for these acute services.