

Predicting health trends and service use in 2035

To ensure the healthcare system will cope with future demand our government requires long-term projections of healthcare use and expenditure. With 20 years of data on 58,000 Australian women, the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health is uniquely positioned to identify trends in women's health and health service use, and make projections of future health service burden.

Objectives

The report, *Future health service use and cost: Insights from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health* was prepared for the Australian Government Department of Health to support the development and implementation of healthcare policies. It aims to:

- identify trends in women's health status, risk and behaviour from 2015 to 2035;
- predict potential health service use and burden on the healthcare system in 2035; and
- assess the key drivers of poor health in Australian women with particular attention to recognised health disparities between subgroups of the population.

The report focuses on four major contributors to the burden of disease in Australia: obesity, smoking, mental health problems, and dementia. It also analyses characteristics known to impact health status including women's highest educational attainment, ability to manage on income, marital status and area of residence.

Findings

Findings from the report have implications for policy makers, industry associations and advocacy groups operating at state and national levels.

Obesity

- The number of obese women will double from 2.6 million (26.6%) to 4.8 million (40%) by 2035.
- Successive generations of women are getting fatter faster
- The proportion of health expenditure for obese women will double and is increasing faster than health care expenditure for non-obese women.

Dementia

The primary risk factor for dementia is age. About 28% of women in the study were estimated to have dementia by age 90.

- The number of women in the Australian population living with dementia is predicted to double by 2035 if prevalence remains the same.
- Women with better mental health at ages 70-75 had lower rates of subsequent dementia.
- Women living in rural locations at ages 70-75 had lower rates of subsequent dementia.

Smoking

The uptake of smoking is lower in each successive generation. Overall smoking prevalence will decrease from 10% of Australian women in 2015 to 3% in 2035.

Mental health

The number of women experiencing psychological distress is expected to increase from 1.2 million in 2015 to 1.7 million in

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Future health service use and cost: Insights from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health by Mishra G, Chan H, Hockey R, Waller M, Kanesarajah J, Byles J, and Dobson A.

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2035. However, the prevalence of psychological distress actually decreases with age. So, while the population increases, the overall prevalence will decrease from 14.1% to 13.7% in 2035.

Care giving

By the time women are in their late eighties, 22% will need help with daily tasks. The number of women needing help in 2035 is expected to rise from 3.9% to 4.6%. This increase is likely to translate into large increases in demands on healthcare and increases in healthcare costs.

About the study

The study follows 58,000 women born between 1921-26, 1946-51, 1973-78, and 1989-95. They provide data on the social, psychological, physical, and environmental aspects of their health and their use of health services. This is linked to records for the Medicare Benefits Scheme, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Cancer Registries, National Death Index, hospital, and aged care data. The study is managed by researchers from the University of Newcastle and the University of Queensland. We are grateful to the Australian Government Department of Health for funding and to the women who provided the survey data. We acknowledge the Department of Health and Medicare Australia for providing the PBS and MBS data. We also acknowledge the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) as the integrating authority for these data.



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