

Australia's
HEALTH
2002



AIHW

Australia's **HEALTH** **2002**

The eighth biennial
health report of the
Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare



Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
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The Institute is Australia's national health and welfare statistics and information agency, and is part of the Commonwealth's Health and Aged Care portfolio. The Institute's mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians by informing community discussion and decision-making through national leadership in developing and providing health and welfare statistics and information.

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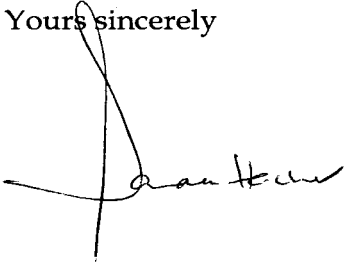
Senator the Hon Kay Patterson
Minister for Health and Ageing
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

On behalf of the Board of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare I am pleased to present to you *Australia's Health 2002*, as required under Subsection 31(1) of the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*.

I commend this report to you as a significant contribution to national information on health needs and services and to the development and evaluation of health policies and programs in Australia.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sandra Hacker
Chairperson of the Board

24 May 2002

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Preface

Since 1988 *Australia's Health* has reported on the health status of Australians, determinants of health, risk factors affecting health, and services and resources applied within the healthcare system. This 2002 edition follows the framework agreed by Australian Health Ministers in 2001, and includes reporting on the six National Health Priority Areas.

The health of most Australians is very good and continues to improve, although regrettably there is still no evidence of improvement for Indigenous Australians. Health services are widely available and accessible, and of high quality. There are pressures at all levels of the health system, with around 640,000 people being employed in the sector to deliver a complex and demanding array of services. Together these account for 8.5% of Gross Domestic Product.

Australia's Health 2002 describes a wide array of factors that affect demand for, and supply of health interventions and services, which in turn contribute to overall health expenditure. Most interventions have an immediate effect, but for some, particularly those that impact on risk factors, the effects may not be obvious for some years. Thus evaluation of our success means examining changes in risk factor prevalence as well as final outcomes. In this light, as a nation we have been successful in reducing smoking rates, with only 19.5% of adults now smoking daily. Vaccination coverage has expanded and there has been an overall reduction in high blood pressure within the community. But there is still more to do, especially in areas such as physical inactivity, obesity and motor vehicle accidents.

On the treatment side, our cancer survival results are world class, and heart disease survival is also excellent. Again, there are areas of potential improvement. For example, by supporting better prescribing practices we may be able to reduce the incidence of pharmaceutical adverse events.

The authors of this report have provided excellent material for thoughtful reflection and analysis. Readers can develop an informed view of the pressures acting on the health system now, and likely future developments. The complex interactions among such a large number of factors makes summary difficult. But make sense of it we must, as there is no doubt that today's decisions on service provision, financing, infrastructure and training will have substantial effects on the nation's future health, the health system and its overall cost.

As always, feedback from you, our readers, is welcome.

The *Australia's Health 2002* author team was led by Geoff Sims, and then Ching Choi. I would particularly like to thank the whole team and the members of the Editorial Committee for another landmark report to continue the series proudly produced by the AIHW since 1988.

Richard Madden
Director

