



Highlights

The epidemic of heart, stroke and vascular diseases continues...

- Heart, stroke and vascular diseases kill more Australians than any other disease group—50,294 deaths (37.6% of all deaths) in 2002.
- Around 3.67 million Australians are affected by heart, stroke and vascular diseases.
- 1.10 million Australians are disabled long-term by heart, stroke and vascular diseases.
- The prevalence of heart, stroke and vascular conditions increased by 18.2% over the last decade.
- The total burden of heart, stroke and vascular diseases is expected to increase over the coming decades due to the growing number of elderly Australians, among whom these diseases are most common.

Some Australians are more likely to suffer from heart, stroke and vascular diseases than others.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared with other Australians are:
 - 2.6 times as likely to die from heart, stroke and vascular diseases
 - 19 times as likely to die from acute rheumatic fever and chronic rheumatic heart disease
 - two to three times as likely to be hospitalised for coronary heart disease and heart failure
 - six to eight times as likely to be hospitalised for acute rheumatic fever and chronic rheumatic disease
 - more likely to smoke, have high blood pressure, be obese, have diabetes, drink alcohol at harmful levels, and have end-stage renal disease.
- Australians in the most disadvantaged groups compared with those in the most advantaged groups are:
 - more likely to die from heart, stroke and vascular diseases
 - more likely to smoke daily, be obese and have diabetes.

Coronary heart disease and stroke are Australia's first and second biggest killers—not surprising given that:

- 90% of Australian adults have at least one modifiable risk factor for heart, stroke and vascular diseases and 25% have three or more risk factors.
- The proportion of Australian adults with risk factors is high:
 - 60% are overweight—7.42 million adults
 - 54% are not sufficiently active to achieve health benefits—7.27 million adults
 - 51% have high blood cholesterol—6.40 million adults
 - 30% have high blood pressure—3.69 million adults
 - 20% smoke daily—3.06 million adults
 - 10% drink at levels considered harmful to their health—1.54 million adults
 - 8% have diabetes—945,600 adults.
- Some risk factors continue to show unfavourable trends:
 - the prevalence of obesity has doubled over the last 20 years
 - the prevalence of diabetes has doubled over the last 20 years
 - the prevalence of people doing insufficient physical activity for health benefits increased by 10% between 1997 and 2000
 - the prevalence of high blood cholesterol has not fallen over the last 20 years.

However, death rates from heart, stroke and vascular diseases are falling, coinciding with:

- a 21% and 16% fall in smoking rates for males and females over the last decade
- a 50% fall in the prevalence of high blood pressure since the 1980s
- a 25% fall in the incidence of coronary events over the last decade
- falls in coronary heart disease deaths in hospital, suggesting better survival of those with the disease
- rapid increases between 1997 and 2000 in the community use of prescription drugs to lower blood pressure, drugs to lower blood cholesterol and antiplatelet drugs.