

# Heart, stroke and vascular diseases

Australian facts  
**2004**

National Centre for Monitoring Cardiovascular Disease

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# Preface

The prevention and control of heart, stroke and vascular diseases remain a significant challenge for Australia. Despite major falls in death rates over the past 30 years and advances in treatment and care, heart, stroke and vascular diseases collectively are still Australia's leading cause of premature death and disability. They are also the most expensive disease group in Australia in terms of health expenditure. Some groups within the community have much higher rates of illness and death from these diseases than others, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those who are at a socioeconomic disadvantage.

There is a continuing need to inform the public, health professionals and policy makers about the considerable scope for prevention, progress in treatment and care, and those people who may need extra attention.

*Heart, Stroke and Vascular Diseases—Australian Facts 2004* is the third report in a series by the National Centre for Monitoring Cardiovascular Disease. It aims to present information and statistics about:

- patterns and trends in heart, stroke and vascular diseases
- contributing risk factors and associated conditions
- treatment and care.

A major theme in this edition is health inequalities. A table summarising available data on health inequalities is provided for each of the diseases and risk factors.

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The report is available on the Institute's web site <<http://www.aihw.gov.au>>



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# 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.

