

But there's much scope to do better

Why can we say this?



First, the international comparisons shown earlier reveal that better health is already being achieved by other countries in many areas (despite Australia's mostly good rankings). Second, time trends show that we can improve even when we are already doing well, and even if we are only competing with ourselves.

A third reason can be explained by our scope to reduce our levels of risk factors—those factors that increase our risk of ill health or death. They are the subject of the this section.

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Risky effects

A major study calculated the contribution of 14 risk factors to the total burden of disease in Australia in 2003. Most of the factors are behaviours or strongly related to them. They are all preventable to some degree, often completely. Tobacco made the greatest contribution at the time, closely followed by high blood pressure and overweight/obesity.

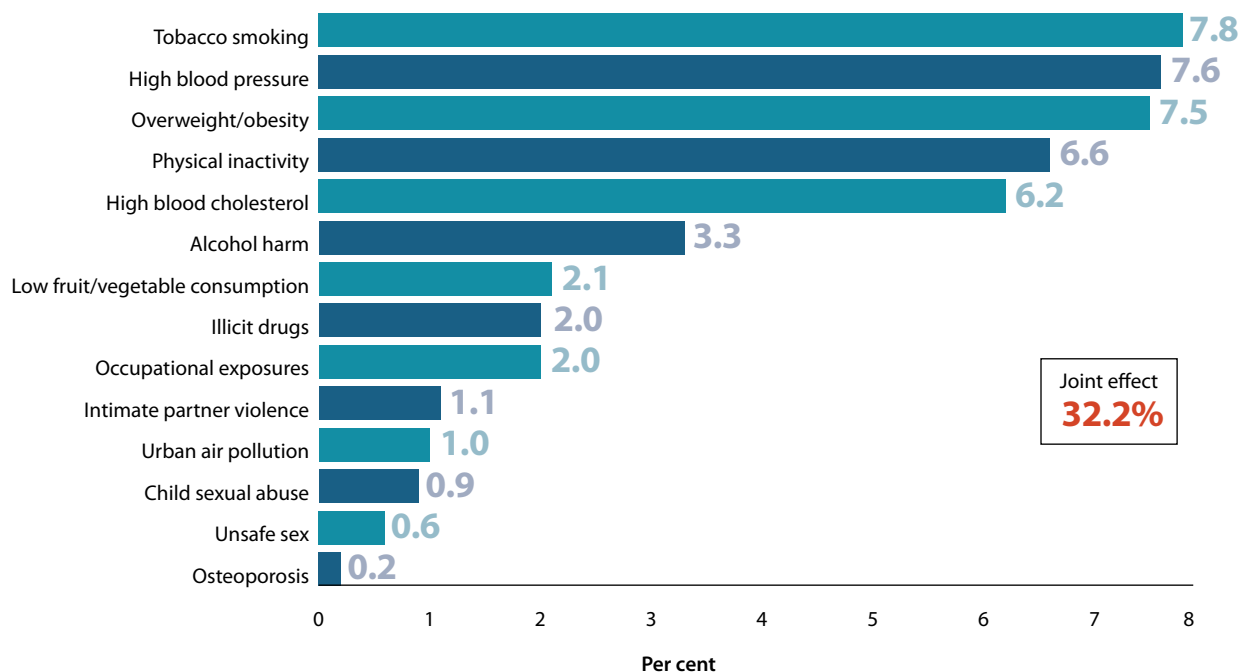
The main finding is that together they accounted for *almost one-third* of Australia's total burden of disease. This is another way of showing the great scope to do better.

Note that the combined result is less than the sum of the separate effects, because those effects overlap.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 3

Proportion of total disease burden contributed by risk factors, 2003



Tobacco, marijuana use down

Rates of cigarette smoking in Australia have been falling for decades. About 1 in 6 Australians aged 14 years and over now smoke daily, compared with around half of adults in the 1950s. Smoking rates among children and young people have fallen apace in recent times: among those aged 12–19 years in 2007, about 1 in 18 smoked daily.

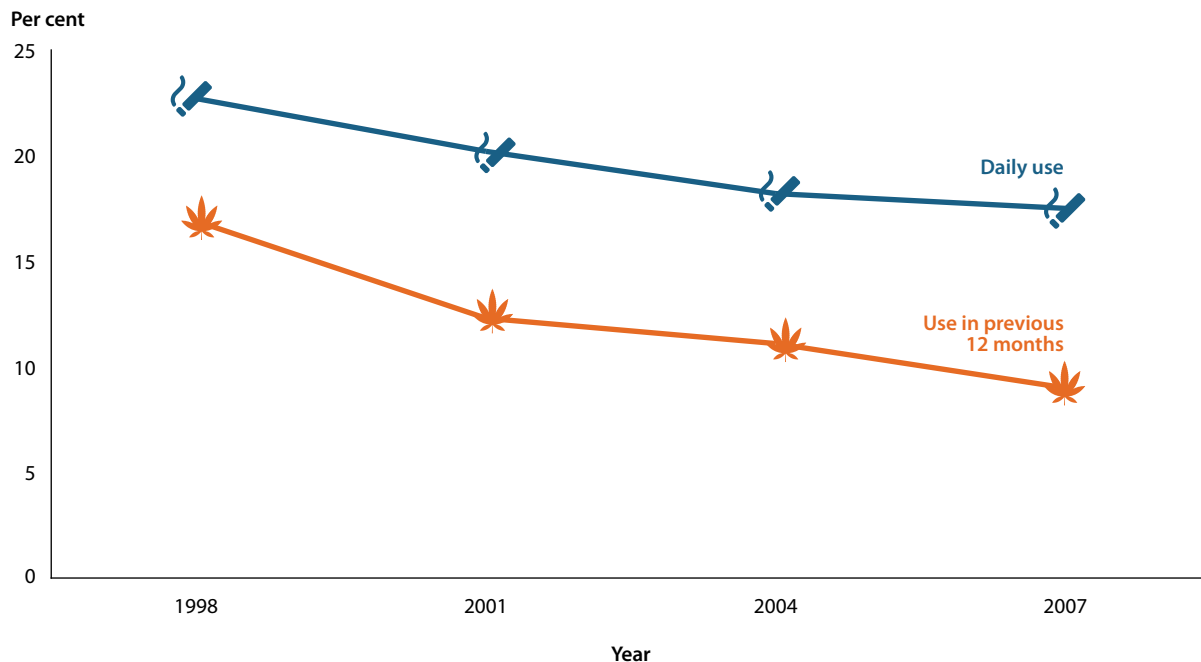
Over the past decade, there has also been a clear and steady fall in the use of marijuana/cannabis. In 2007, fewer than 1 in 10 (9%) of those aged 14 years and over reported having used it in the preceding 12 months. When marijuana/cannabis is excluded, it seems that overall illicit drug use has not declined over the decade. However, heroin use in the preceding 12 months has been stable since 2001 at 2 in every

1,000 people, after reaching a high of 8 in every 1,000 in 1998. Also, the use of methamphetamine (the drug that includes 'ice') in the preceding 12 months steadily declined, from 3.7% in 1998 to 2.3% in 2007.

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Prevalence of smoking and marijuana use: trends



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But alcohol flat

Despite encouraging falls in the use of marijuana/cannabis and cigarettes, levels of risky alcohol use have not improved lately. The latest three national surveys show this clearly between 2001 and 2007. In each of the survey years, about 1 in 10 Australian adults put their health at long term risk by drinking too much. Similarly, double that number drank in a way that was risky in the short term.

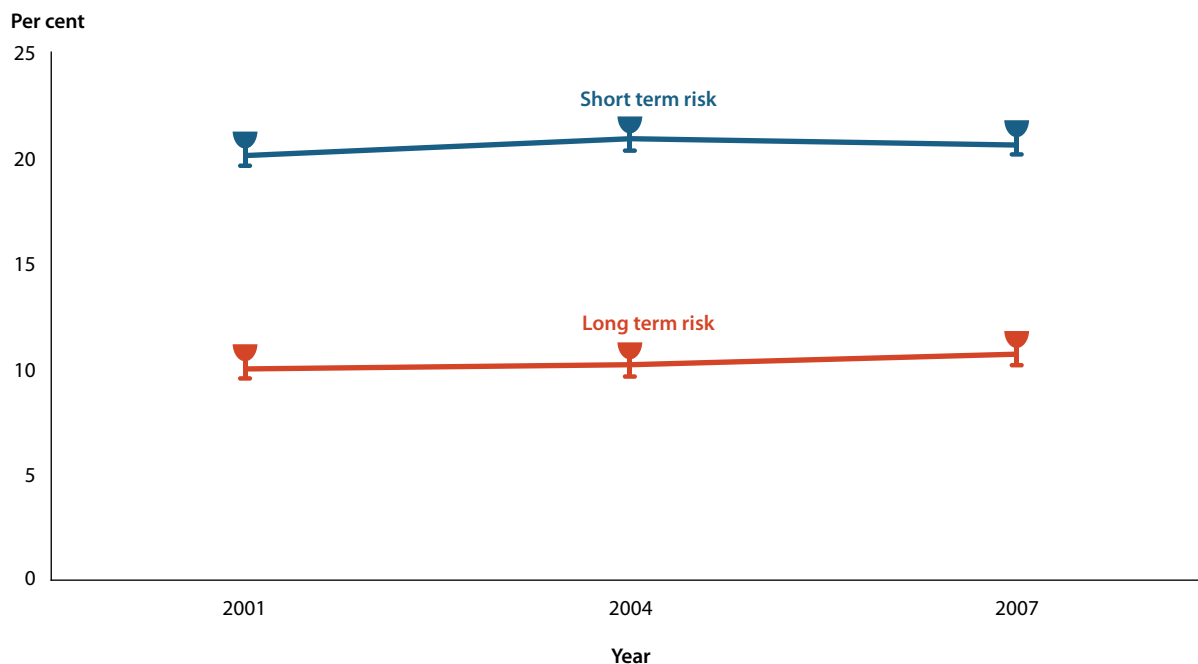
In 2007, fewer than 1 in 250 (0.4%) young Australians aged 12–17 years drank alcohol daily, compared with about 1 in 11 (8.7%) adults as a whole. As with adults, levels of risky alcohol use among young people have been fairly stable over the last decade.

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Prevalence of risky drinking



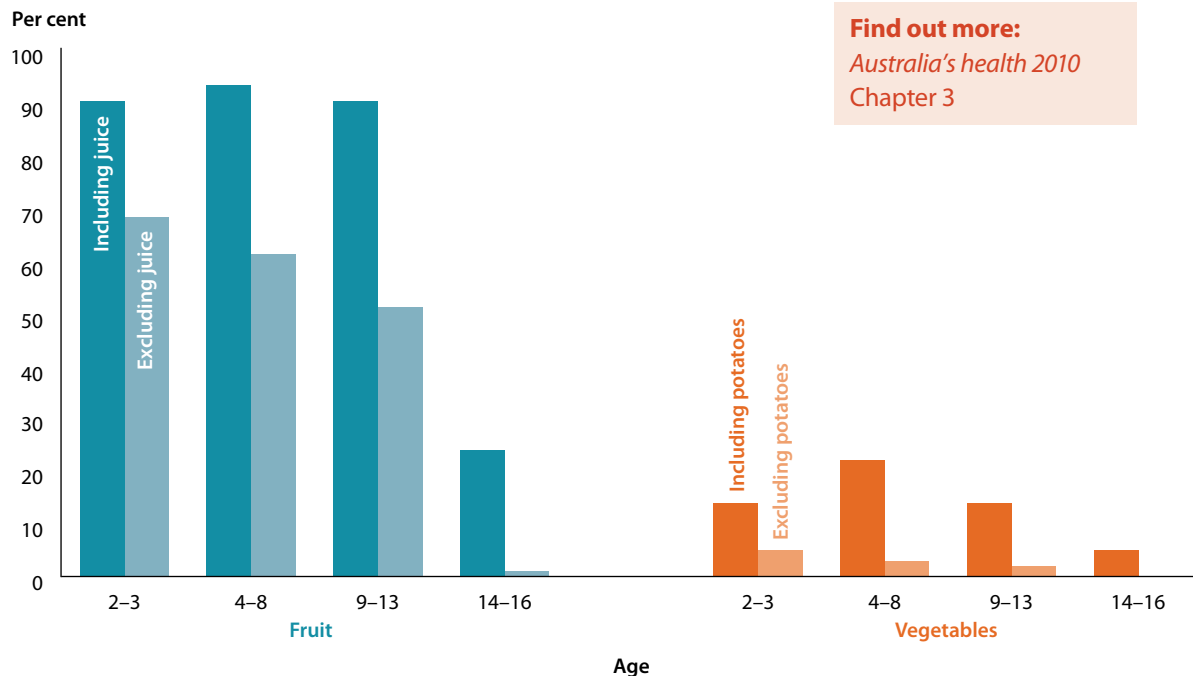
Eating our fruit and vegies?

Low consumption of fruit and vegetables was ranked seventh among 14 risk factors in its contribution to Australia's disease burden in 2003. More recent findings suggest that Australia's consumption falls far short of health recommendations. From self-reported data in 2007–08, about half of adults consumed 2 or more serves of fruit per day, when the recommended number is 2–4 serves. For vegetables, fewer than one in 10 ate 5 serves per day, when the recommended number is 4–8 serves.

A national children's survey in 2007 shows that this problem strongly applies to children too, although their recommended fruit and vegetable serves are generally fewer than for adults. Take 14–16 year olds, for example. If fruit juice is not counted as

a fruit serve, only 1% of them met the fruit recommendations; and when it is counted, only 24% did. The situation was much worse for vegetables. If potatoes are counted, about 5% met the recommendations. If they are not counted, none did. Although younger children ate slightly more fruit and vegetables, their intakes were still below recommendations.

Children meeting recommended serves of fruit and vegetables, 2007



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