INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Cardiovascular disease is not just a health problem experienced in Australia. It is a major health and economic burden throughout the world, especially in developed countries. The following comparisons are presented using the latest available data for selected countries, ranging from 1989–95.

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

Cardiovascular disease includes coronary heart disease, stroke and other forms of heart and vascular disease. The Russian Federation shows the highest death rates from cardiovascular disease of the 17 countries compared. Their death rate is over three times that of Australia for both males and females. Males in Hong Kong have the lowest death rate for cardiovascular disease, the Russian Federation rate being about six times greater. For females, the lowest death rates are found in France, Hong Kong and Japan. All of these countries have rates less than a quarter of those in the Russian Federation.

Australia and cardiovascular disease

Australian death rates are ranked towards the middle of the 17 countries compared (ranked equal 7th lowest with Italy). The Australian death rate for males is 1.7 times that for Hong Kong males. For Australian females the death rate is 1.5 times that of French females.

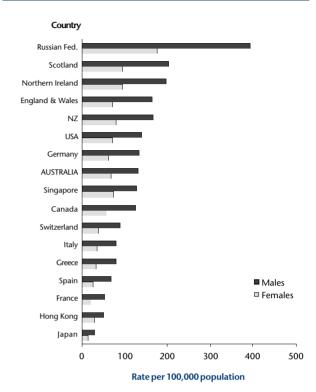
Trends

During the period 1950–92, death rates for cardiovascular disease have declined in all countries compared here. Rates in Australia have halved in this time. Canada (for males and females) along with Switzerland and France (for females) are the only countries to exceed Australia's death rate decline.

CORONARY HEART DISEASE

Coronary heart disease is the major cardiovascular cause of death in Australia. It is caused by blockages in the coronary arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle. Australian death rates from coronary heart disease rank towards the middle of those countries compared (ranked 10th lowest for males and females). Coronary heart disease death rates tend to be lower in Asian and Mediterranean countries. There has been significant miscoding of coronary heart disease deaths in numerous countries, including Spain, Italy, Japan and France.

However, even after recoding, these countries are still found to have low death rates. The highest death rates are recorded in the Russian Federation. Their death rates are twice those of the next highest country, Scotland.



Note: Latest available data ranging from 1992–94.

Source: AIHW 1998a.

Death rates from coronary heart disease for selected countries, 1992–94

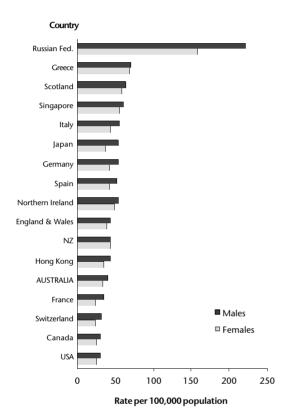
Trends

In recent decades, death rates for coronary heart disease have declined in most of the countries compared. In particular, the United States, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, Italy (for females) and Spain (for females) have all seen their death rates halved. Australian death rates have also halved in this time. Exceptions to this trend include Norway and France. Although their death rates are presently lower than they were during 1960–84, they are still higher than their early 1950s rates.

STROKE

Stroke death rates in Australia are among the lowest of those countries compared here (ranked fifth lowest for males and females).

The Australian stroke death rates for males were still onethird higher than those recorded in the United States. Females in France and Switzerland have the lowest death rates for stroke, and Australian females have 1.4 times their rate. Unlike for coronary heart disease, Greece and Japan have one of the highest death rates for stroke.



Note: Latest available data ranging from 1992-94.

Sources: AIHW 1998a.

Death rates from stroke for selected countries, 1992–94

Trends

Between 1970 and 1992, declines in stroke death rates have been rapid for all countries compared. Almost all countries have seen declines in stroke death rates of greater than 30%, except for Greece where the rate of decline was less than 10%. Australian stroke death rates have declined more than 60% during 1970–92.

RISK FACTORS

Variation in cardiovascular disease death rates for different countries may be attributed to different diets and lifestyles. From available data, Australia appears to have similar risk factor patterns to other Western countries including the United States, Canada, Britain and New Zealand.

Smoking

The proportion of adults who regularly smoke in Australia (24% in 1995) appears to be quite low compared with many other countries. Greece, Japan and Spain had the highest proportion of adult smokers (34%–37%). Smoking rates among adults in the United States was 26% in 1992.

High blood pressure

Australian adults appear to be ranked around the middle of the countries compared here for the number of people with high blood pressure (17% in 1995).

High blood cholesterol

The proportion of Australian adults with high blood cholesterol (43% in 1989) compares similarly with the rates seen in the United States and Canada.

Overweight

The proportion of Australian adults who are overweight (56% in 1995) appears to be greater than many other countries. This rate is similar to that seen in the United States.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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