

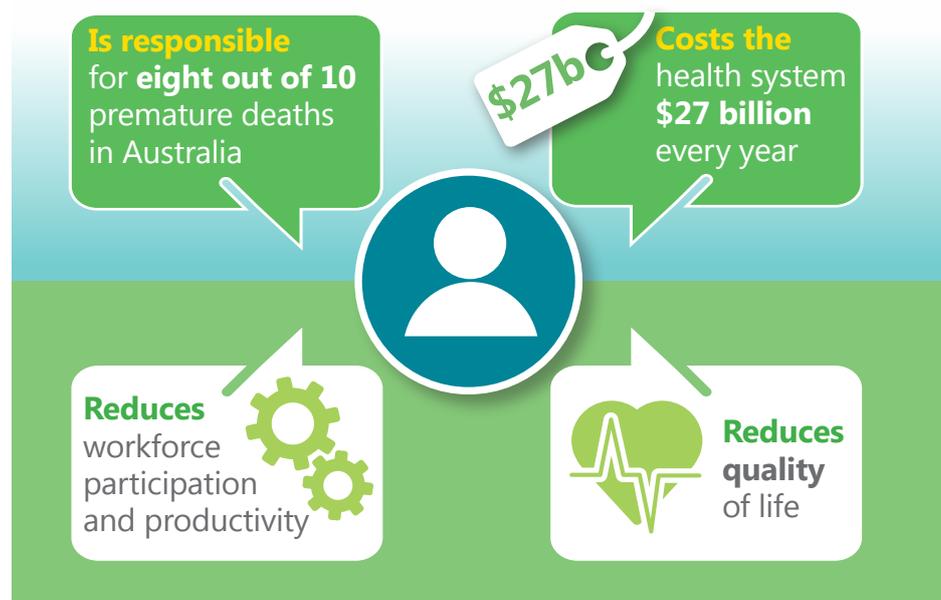


The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre
Systems and solutions for better health



Preventing our greatest health problem

Chronic disease...



An unsustainable burden

Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in Australia. They cause eight out of every 10 premature deaths¹ and account for 80% of years lost due to ill health, disability or early death.²

These long-lasting diseases, including arthritis, cancer, respiratory disease, heart disease and diabetes, restrict how millions of Australians live and work every day.²

The cost of chronic diseases to the community is considerable and growing. The Australian health system spends an estimated \$27 billion a year treating chronic diseases – 36% of all health spending.² The growing burden of chronic disease has the potential to overwhelm the health budget and our health services, especially when we take into account the costs of lost productivity and caring for people with disability.³

The problem is rapidly becoming worse due to changes to our lifestyle and our ageing population. Prevention policy tends to focus on individual responsibility. But despite public health messages, problems like obesity and physical inactivity are still increasing.²

The lifestyle-related behaviours that cause chronic health problems are complex and embedded in everyday life. Successful prevention requires a broader approach that moves beyond people's personal choices to one that helps people to lead healthier lives and reduce exposure to risk factors.

Chronic diseases are the leading cause of premature death in Australia.¹

80% of all heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and 40% of cancers could be prevented if known risk factors were eliminated.⁴

Tobacco and alcohol use are falling in Australia, but obesity is a growing problem. More than 60% of Australian adults are now overweight or obese.⁵

Prevention is effective and cost-effective. Taking action on tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy foods alone would save \$6 billion in health costs.⁶

Successful prevention requires a broader approach that moves beyond the focus on the individual and recognises the complex causes of chronic disease.

A systems approach recognises and intervenes in the root causes of a problem, looking at all the interconnected and inter-related issues.

The Prevention Centre is using systems thinking to attack the problem from many different angles and in coordinated, dynamic and flexible ways.

Tackling the whole system means we can create an environment that supports people to make better health decisions and avoid chronic disease.

The problem can be prevented

Behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption, poor nutrition and physical inactivity are responsible for many chronic diseases. These behaviours increase the risk because they raise blood pressure, lead to overweight and obesity, and cause high levels of glucose and/or fat in the blood.⁴

Nearly all Australian adults have at least one risk factor for chronic disease; half of us have two or three.² The World Health Organization estimates that 80% of all heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and more than 40% of cancers could be prevented if known risk factors were eliminated.⁴

Australia has a strong track record in tackling some of these risk factors, such as tobacco use. However, our health policy priorities still tend to focus on treatment rather than prevention. Australia's spending on prevention and public health is lower than many other Western countries, at 1.7% of total health expenditure (\$2.23 billion in 2011–12) compared to 7% in New Zealand and 5.9% in Canada.²

Addressing risk factors to prevent chronic disease is relatively inexpensive and can save governments money. For example, increasing taxes on tobacco, alcohol and

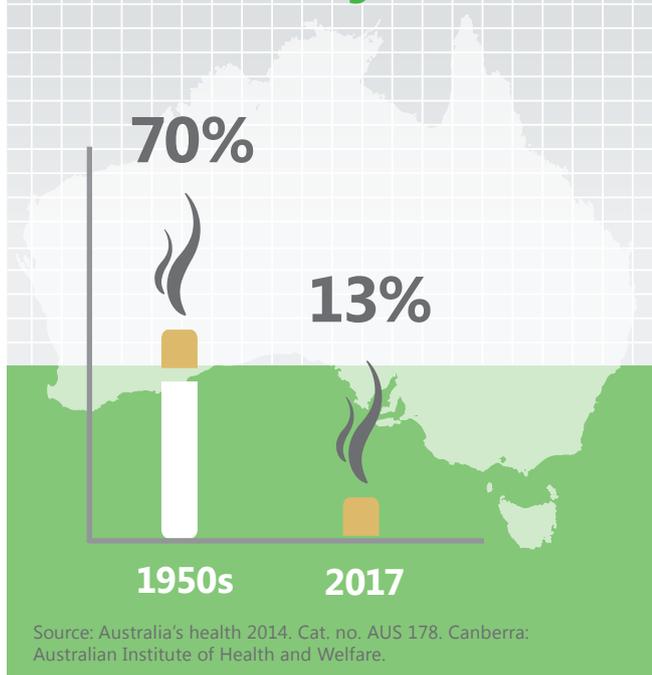
unhealthy foods and limiting salt in processed foods together would save \$6 billion in health costs and prevent 650,000 years lived with a disability.⁶



Addressing risk factors to prevent chronic disease is relatively inexpensive and can save governments money.

The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre's research shows there is widespread community support for a government role in addressing harmful lifestyle behaviours. In the preliminary results of our national population survey to better understand community attitudes around prevention, most people supported restrictions on advertising of unhealthy foods to children, health ratings on packaged foods and salt regulation.⁷

Australia's smoking rate



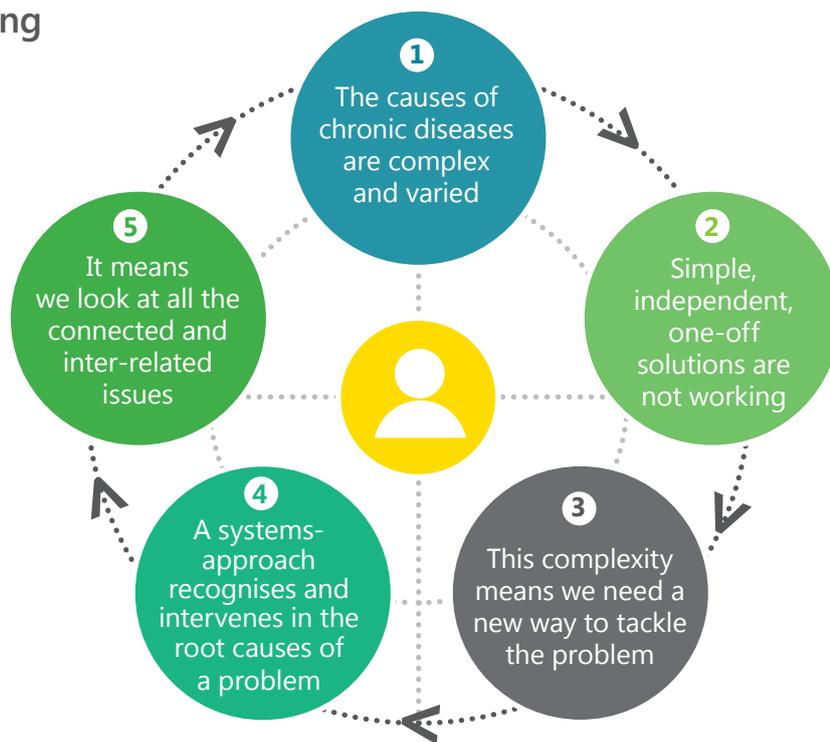
Prevention activities work: A case study of success

We know from past experience that we can reduce death and disability from chronic disease and save healthcare costs by taking a coordinated approach to tackling key risk factors.⁶

For example, Australia leads the world in reducing tobacco use. The smoking rate in Australia has declined from 70% in the 1950s to 13% today, cutting deaths from lung cancer by 40% and deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease by 60%.²

This result has been achieved through a comprehensive approach, including tax increases, plain packaging and social marketing and smoking regulation, with support from all levels of government, non-government organisations, the health sector and community groups.⁸

Systems thinking



A systems approach to prevent chronic disease

The causes of chronic diseases are complex and varied.⁹ People's health is influenced by more than their individual decision making. Many interconnected factors contribute to chronic disease, including people's background, their environment and their ability to make healthy choices.

This complexity means we need a new way to tackle the problem. Simple, independent, one-off solutions are not working. To effectively prevent complex chronic health problems in the long term, we need to recognise the role of social, economic and environmental factors and how each of these interacts. This requires a systems approach.¹⁰

Factors that contribute to the development of chronic diseases include:

- Individual biology and behaviour
- The availability and quality of healthcare
- Individuals' ability to make informed decisions about their health
- Socio-economic status
- The physical and social environment.¹⁰

A systems approach recognises and intervenes in the root causes of a problem. It means we look at all the connected and inter-related issues, at how changing one part will influence other parts, and how relationships and behaviours change over time.¹¹

To change health behaviour, we need a range of governments, organisations and individuals to work together in a coordinated way to attack the problem from many different angles and in dynamic, flexible ways.

Tackling the whole system means we can create an environment that supports people to make better health decisions and avoid chronic disease.

How we are using systems thinking

The Prevention Centre is using a systems approach to the prevention of chronic disease.¹² We do this through:

- Being systematic about prevention: How to transform one-off programs and partial investment in public health into a comprehensive pattern of delivery
- Working across different systems to improve health: Our research involves sectors outside health, including the food, transport system, housing and economic systems
- Recognising that prevention action takes place in a local system: We research how interventions interact with local roles and relationships
- Using systems tools and theories to analyse and improve policy and practice in prevention: We produce tools to synthesise evidence and inform decision-making.

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