

RELEASE OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEY: SUMMARY OF RESULTS, AUSTRALIA 2001

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has recently released the *National Health Survey: Summary of Results, Australia 2001*. This report summarises results from the National Health Survey conducted by the ABS from February to November 2001.

The health survey was designed to obtain national benchmarks on a wide range of health issues, and to enable changes in health to be monitored over time. Information was collected on:

- health status of the population;
- use of health services and other actions people had recently taken for their health;
- health-related aspects of lifestyle and other health risk factors.

Some of the findings of the survey include:

- more than 80 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over considered their health to be good, very good, or excellent;
- almost 90 per cent of Australians assessed their health as being better or about the same as one year ago.

Compared with 1989–90, Australian adults showed improved results against the risk factors of smoking and exercise. However, levels of obesity and overweight continued to increase, and levels of alcohol use were unchanged. Among risk factors, main findings of the Survey were:

- *smoking*—approximately one in four adults (24 per cent) were smokers;
- *exercise*—although most exercised at relatively low levels, 70 per cent of adults reported that they had done some exercise for recreation, sport, or fitness in the two weeks prior to being surveyed;
- *overweight*—some 30 per cent of males and 38 per cent of females assessed themselves as being overweight. When body mass index was calculated from reported height and weight, 58 per cent of males and 42 per cent of females were classified as overweight or obese;
- *alcohol*—the majority of adults (71 per cent of males and 52 per cent of females) had consumed alcohol in the week prior to interview, but over 80 per cent had consumed alcohol at a level that would constitute a low risk to their health.

Other findings from the survey include:

- seventy-eight per cent of the population reported that they had at least one long-term medical condition, such as a respiratory condition, asthma, hay fever, a sight condition, arthritis, hearing loss, or high blood pressure;
- moderate or higher levels of psychological distress were recorded for 36 per cent of the population;
- some 13 per cent of males and 11 per cent of females reported sustaining an injury in the four weeks prior to interview; the most common being low falls (less than one metre) which accounted for one-third of recent injury;
- one in four (24 per cent) people had consulted a doctor in the two weeks prior to interview, and six per cent had consulted a dentist;
- approximately 14 per cent of employed people had taken one or more days off work in the two weeks before being surveyed, due to their own illness or to care for another who was ill;
- just over half (51 per cent) of people aged 15 years and over had private health insurance with 73 per cent of those having both hospital and ancillary cover;
- over three-quarters (78 per cent) of women reported having regular breast examinations of some kind, and 60 per cent have regular Pap tests;
- among females aged 18 to 24 years, 13 per cent were classified as being underweight, based on self-reported height and weight;
- one in five (19 per cent) of women aged 40 years and over reported that they were currently using hormone replacement therapy (HRT) prescribed by a doctor.

For more information about *National Health Survey: Summary of Results, Australia 2001* please visit the ABS website at www.abs.gov.au or phone the National Information and Referral Service on 1300 135 070 and quote Catalogue no. 4364.0. ☎