

Conclusion

The New South Wales Population Health Survey began as a continuous survey in 2002, following adult health surveys in 1997 and 1998. Most indicators are collected and reported annually but some are collected and reported biennially and triennially. In 2006, data were collected on demographics, health behaviours, health status, use of and satisfaction with health services, and social capital. Some of these indicators are highlighted below.

Health behaviours

Health behaviours influence health and wellbeing. There have been significant changes in some indicators of health behaviour, while other indicators have not changed significantly.

There have been significant increases in hand washing when preparing raw meat, vaccination against influenza, vaccination against pneumococcal pneumonia, vaccination against meningococcal disease, homes with a smoke alarm or detector, recommended daily fruit consumption, use of low fat or reduced fat or skim milk, adequate physical activity, smoke-free homes, smoke-free cars, and the proportion of adults who would be more likely to attend pubs or clubs if smoking was banned.

There have been significant decreases in any alcohol risk drinking, high risk alcohol drinking, Pap tests within the last 2 years, exposure to unflued heating in living areas, fires in the home that activated smoke alarms, current smoking, daily smoking, and in the proportion of adults who would be less likely to attend pubs or clubs if smoking was banned.

The proportion of screening mammograms in the last 2 years, hysterectomy, use of the public water supply for drinking water, recommended vegetable consumption, food insecurity in the last 12 months, and doctor's advice to quit smoking, have not changed significantly.

In 2006, 8 new indicators were collected for health behaviours: swimming, fishing, rock fishing, snorkelling or scuba diving in the last 4 weeks; swimming ability among those who swam, fished, rock fished, snorkelled or scuba dived in the last 4 weeks; knowledge of recommended fruit serves; knowledge of recommended vegetable serves; daily consumption of 3 or more serves of vegetables; weekly or more use of neighbourhood facilities; more likely to attend outdoor dining areas if smoking was banned; and less likely to attend outdoor dining areas if smoking was banned.

Health status

Monitoring the health status of a population helps detect emerging patterns of illness and disease and provides information to inform health policy and planning of health services. There have been significant changes in some indicators of health status, while other indicators have not changed significantly.

There have been increases in the proportion of adults ever diagnosed with asthma, who have diabetes or high blood glucose, who have visited a dental professional in the last 12 months, who are overweight or obese, and who are obese.

There have been decreases in the proportion of adults who have experienced moderate to extreme interference with daily activities due to asthma, who have all their natural teeth missing, and who have rated their health as excellent or very good or good.

The proportion of adults with current asthma, with a written asthma management plan, who experienced urinary incontinence in the last 4 weeks, who had a fall in the last 12 months, who had a fall requiring medical treatment, who had a fall requiring hospitalisation, and who agree with adding fluoride to the public water supply, have not changed significantly.

In 2006, 9 new indicators were collected for health status: asthma reliever medication used in the last 12 months, asthma preventer medication used in the last 12 months, current smoking among those with current asthma, any action taken to prevent falls, fear of falling, those with high or very high psychological distress who attended a community event in the last 6 months, those with high or very

high psychological distress who helped out at a local group or organisation in the last 3 months, those with high or very high psychological distress who were active members of a local organisation or church or club, and those with 3 or more chronic disease risk factors.

Health services

Information about the use of and satisfaction with health services assists in formulating health policy and health service planning. There have been significant changes in some health service indicators, while other indicators have not changed significantly.

Between 1997 and 2005, in both males and females, there have been increases in: the proportion of adults with private health insurance; and the proportion of adults with difficulties getting health care when needing it.

There has been no significant change in: emergency department presentations in the last 12 months or the overall rating of emergency department care as excellent, very good or good. There has been no significant change in hospital admissions in the last 12 months or in the overall rating of hospital care as excellent, very good or good. There has been no significant change in the proportion of visits to community health centres or public dental services.

Social capital

Social capital is created from the everyday interactions between people. It is called capital because it can be measured and quantified in a way that can distribute its benefits and avoid its losses. There have been significant changes in some indicators of social capital, while other indicators have not changed significantly.

Between 2002 and 2005, in both males and females, there have been increases in the proportion of adults who: attended a community event at least once in the last 6 months, said most people can be trusted, who felt safe walking down their street after dark, said their local area has a reputation for being a safe place.

Between 2002 and 2005, in both males and females, there have been decreases in the proportion of adults who: visited neighbours, and felt able to ask for neighbourhood help to care for a child.

There has been no significant change in the proportion of adults who: helped out at any local group or organisation at least once in the last 3 months; were active members of a local organisation or church or club; ran into friends and acquaintances when shopping in their local area; or would feel sad if they had to leave their neighbourhood.

The future

The collection and reporting plan for the New South Wales Population Health Survey to 2012 can be found at www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/survey/hsurvey.html. The continued monitoring of indicators via the Survey will provide information to assist health professionals, health service planners and those involved in development of health policy.