

Men's Health Fact Sheet #5: The male burden of disease

Background

1. Men in Australia experience more death, disease, illness and injuries than women.
2. The "burden of disease" is a measurement used to provide an evidence base for monitoring population health, developing health policy and health service planning and assessing the potential cost-effectiveness of health interventions. The word "disease" is often used to refer collectively to disease, illnesses and injuries.
3. The "burden of disease" statistic takes into account the combined impact of two measures: fatal burden of disease (the number of years of life lost to premature death) and non-fatal burden (the years of good health lost to disease, illness and injury). The "burden of disease" is considered to be the best summary measure of a population's health as it goes beyond measuring how long people live (the quantity of life) and attempts to measure their quality of life.

Overall Burden of Disease

4. As a nation, we lose 4.5 million years of good health due to premature death or living with disease, illness or injury every year. This burden is split almost equally between 2.3 million years of life lost each year to premature death and 2.2 million years of good health lost to disease.
5. Overall, males (54%) experience a greater share of the disease burden than females (46%). Of the 4.5 million years of good health we lose to premature death or living with disease, illness or injury every year, males account for around 2.4 million (2,412,531) and females for 2.1 million (2,081,896).
6. The top four causes of death and disease in Australia are cancer, cardiovascular disease, mental illness and musculoskeletal disease. For males the fifth leading cause is injuries (including suicide) and for females the fifth leading cause is respiratory diseases. The male rate of death and disease is higher than the female rate for injuries (2.7 times higher); cardiovascular disease (80% higher); cancer (40% higher); mental illness (10% higher) and respiratory disease (5%). The female rate for musculoskeletal disease is around 20% higher.

Fatal Burden of Disease

7. Males experience more of the fatal burden of disease than females (58% compared with 42%), losing around 1.3 million years of life to premature death each year compared with 950 thousand years for females. Looking at the rate of years of life lost to disease, males have a 61% higher rate of fatal burden than females.
8. In terms of fatal disease, the three biggest killers are cancer, heart disease and injuries (including suicide) accounting for nearly three quarters of years lost to premature death. The male rate of years lost to premature death is higher than the female rate for injuries (2.6 times higher); cardiovascular disease (80% higher) and cancer (40% higher).

Individual Risk Factors

9. Around 31% of poor health is linked to individual risk factors such as diet. In turn, these individual factors are shaped by a combination of social factors, structural factors and sex/gender differences. The data in this fact sheet refers only to the individual factors.
10. Males account for the majority of disease linked to diets low in fruit (65%), vegetables (62%), nuts and seeds (79%) and whole grains (74%), as well as 75% of the burden linked to diets high in processed meat.
11. Males account for the majority of disease linked to behavioural risks such as tobacco (60%) (70%), alcohol (71%), drugs (75%) and physical inactivity (56%).
12. Males account for the majority of disease linked to biomedical risks such as body mass (60%), blood sugar levels (60%), cholesterol (60%) and blood pressure.
13. Males account for the majority of disease linked to environmental risk such as occupational hazards (72%), high sun exposure (70%) and pollution.

Summary

1. Men in Australia experience more death, disease, illness and injuries than women, accounting for 54% of the overall disease burden and 58% of the burden due to premature death.
2. The male rate of years of life lost to premature death is higher than the female rate for the three biggest killers: cancer (40% higher) cardiovascular disease (80% higher) and and injuries including suicide (2.6 times higher).
3. Males account for the majority of disease linked to individual factors such as diet, smoking, exercise, weight, workplace hazards and pollution.
4. 31% of poor health is linked to individual risk factors, which are in turn influenced by a range of social and structural factors and shaped by sex and gender differences.

Last Updated 21st April 2018 v1.0

SOURCE: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. Australian Burden of Disease Study: Impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2011. Australian Burden of Disease Study series no. 3. BOD 4. Canberra: AIHW.