

Men's health in the spotlight

The Health Column

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It is hardly news that men approach the issue of health and wellbeing differently to women.

This is not only seen anecdotally, but official data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) highlights that men are more likely than women to engage in risky behaviours, and they have a higher incidence than women of many health conditions. Men are also more likely to die from those conditions.

In recognition of this, in 2010 the Australian Government released the National Male Health Policy with a funding commitment of \$16.7 million. The policy aims to improve male health through a number of initiatives including:

- \$6 million over three years to promote the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers, grandfathers and uncles, and encourage them to participate in their children's and families' lives, especially in the antenatal period and early childhood years.
- \$6.9 million over four years for Australia's first national longitudinal study on male health.
- \$3 million over four years to support Men's Sheds in Australia.
- \$400,000 over four years for regular statistical bulletins on male health.
- \$350,000 over four years for the development of a range of health promotion materials for males.

The ABS data shows that lifestyle behaviour such as tobacco smoking, risky alcohol consumption, and obesity are three of the more prominent chronic health risks in modern Australia. The ABS found that men aged 15 years or over were more likely than women to have each of these risk factors. They were more likely to be current smokers (22% compared with 18%), more likely to drink to levels considered risky or high risk to health in the long-term (14% compared with 11%), and more likely to be overweight or obese (66% compared with 54%).

In the ABS survey, 13% of men aged 15 years or over drank alcohol to levels considered risky or high risk to health in the short-term at least once a week. This was much higher than the rate for



women (5.9%) and was highest for young men aged 15–24 years (15%) and men aged 25–44 years (16%).

The good news is - men who had consumed alcohol in the past 12 months were just as likely as women to have reported that their usual consumption had decreased over that period (19% of those who had consumed alcohol in the past 12 months). Around one third of men who were current smokers reduced their smoking level compared with 12 months ago (30% compared with 34% of women).

In addition to having higher rates of long-term risks to health, men, especially younger men, are more likely than women to partake in certain risky activities dangerous to health in the short-term. These activities include drinking alcohol at dangerous levels, the use of illicit drugs and dangerous driving.

This week we are celebrating Men's Health Week (www.menshealthweek.org.au) across Australia and this event differs from many campaigns that aim to shock, scare, compel or otherwise encourage people in the community to do 'more of this and less of that'. Rather, Men's Health Week aims to empower people on the frontline of health to work with and reach out to local men and boys.

Encouraging men to speak to health professionals and look after themselves is important. Your pharmacy is your health destination and your pharmacist is there to provide advice, counselling and professional services along with dispensing prescription medicines. Men are encouraged to speak to their pharmacist about health issues

In addition, more detailed information on men's health issues is available from pharmacies around Australia providing the Self Care health information. These pharmacies have a range of Self Care Fact Cards available and these include topics such as *Men's Health*, *Erectile Dysfunction* and *Prostate Problems*. Phone 1300 369 772 for the nearest location; or alternatively log onto www.psa.org.au and click on "Self Care" then "Find a Self Care Pharmacy".