

Most baby boomers 'under the doctor' at retirement

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(Medical Xpress)—The vast majority of the post-war baby boomers have had at least one medical condition requiring regular GP visits in the run-up to retirement, and just one in six was completely condition free, according to the latest findings from the UK's oldest birth cohort. Diseases affecting more than 10 per cent of those studied included cancer, osteoporosis, chronic respiratory disease and cardiovascular disease.

New research from the MRC National Survey of Health and Development looked at the prevalence of 15 common clinical disorders including heart disease, [high blood pressure](#), obesity, diabetes, cancer and osteoporosis, in a group of 2,661 men and women aged 60-64. It is the first study of its kind in the generation born immediately after [World War II](#) (the so-called baby boomers), who were the first to grow up in the welfare state.

It found that the average baby boomer had two medical conditions at retirement age, the most common being hypertension (half of participants), obesity (a third), [high cholesterol](#) (a quarter) and diabetes or 'pre-diabetes' (also a quarter).

One in five had a number of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders, and these individuals were twice as likely as others to have been in poor health at age 36.

The authors say the findings, published in the journal [PLoS One](#), could

have important implications for the health and social services, which are likely to see increasing demands from an [ageing population](#) in the coming decades. The proportion of the population over the age of 65 is expected to rise by a third from 11.8m in 2008 to 15.6m by 2033.

Lead author Dr Mary Pierce from the MRC Unit for Lifelong Health and Ageing, who is also a practising GP, said:

"The babies born in the post-war period were the first generation to enjoy the lifelong benefits of the NHS and the welfare state, and have an extended life expectancy. We might, therefore, expect this generation to be in pretty good health at retirement age. But our research shows that medical conditions – some of which could lead to serious disability or even death – are common among [baby boomers](#).

"The impact on the health service is likely to escalate, with GPs being increasingly called on to deliver preventative care as part of the public health agenda, in addition to fulfilling their usual reactive role. The effects are already being seen in some areas, with patient consultation rates up 40 per cent in England and Wales over the past decade. This makes for a compelling case to invest in primary care to ease the burden on an already-stretched service."

Professor Diana Kuh, Director of the MRC Unit for Lifelong Health and Ageing, said:

"The latest results from this large, representative population study suggest that the proportion of the population 'under the doctor' will only increase in the coming years. Some of the most common conditions in our study – cardio-metabolic disorders, cancers and osteoporosis – share common root causes related to poor diet and inactive lifestyles.

"The good news is that the risk of developing these conditions can be

reduced by making simple lifestyle changes at a young age. By targeting the most at-risk individuals early on in life – before they reach middle age – we may be able to reduce the pressure on the health service and, more importantly, save lives."

The National Survey of Health and Development follows a group of individuals born in one week in 1946. For this study, participants reported medical conditions that had been diagnosed by a doctor and most also underwent a physical examination. The results were compared with their health as assessed at the [age](#) of 36.

The study looked at the extent of clinical disorders where there is evidence or a consensus for medical intervention rather than the full extent of [health](#) problems in this cohort at [retirement age](#) (conditions such as arthritis were not included).

More information: 'Clinical disorders in a post war British cohort reaching retirement: evidence from the first national birth cohort study' by Pierce et al is published in *PLoS One*.

Provided by Medical Research Council

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