

Australians getting fatter, more anxious, survey finds

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Australians are smoking and drinking less than they were five years ago but are fatter and more anxious, according to a new survey profiling the nation's health launched Tuesday.

The Wellness Index, compiled by polling firm Roy Morgan Research and an initiative of [health](#) company Alere, has surveyed the wellbeing of 50,000 Australians since 2007 to paint a picture of lifestyle and disease.

Roy Morgan chief Michele Levine said overall the index had declined slightly over the past five years, with improvements in measures such as [alcohol consumption](#) and [smoking](#) offset by a worsening in others.

"Over a five-year period, 1.1 million fewer glasses of [alcoholic beverages](#) were consumed every week and 134,000 fewer people now smoke," out of a population of almost 23 million, said Levine.

"But there's just as much bad news as good. For example, 736,000 more adults are now obese. And the number of people with anxiety has grown by 1.3 million."

Australia last year became the first country in the world to mandate plain packaging for [tobacco products](#) in a bid to curb smoking.

It is also trying to reduce binge-drinking through a combination of shock advertising campaigns and taxation.

The index, based on polling of about 4,000 people every month, is compiled from 98 indicators across seven groups—exercise, psychological wellbeing, [nutritional health](#), alcohol, smoking, medical and height and weight.

Its data is intended to be used by local and national governments as well as the healthcare industry and community organisations to track initiatives in areas including nutrition, exercise, smoking, alcohol and stress.

Levine said issues linked to [poor diet](#), lack of exercise, smoking, drinking and obesity were costing the health system more than Aus\$60 billion (US\$62 billion) every year, and better data could be key to turning that around.

Australia is ranked fifth among advanced nations in terms of obesity after the United States, Mexico, New Zealand and Chile, according to the OECD.

Some 21 percent of its population smoke, compared with 24 percent in Britain and 29 percent in the United States, as estimated by the World Health Organization. The Pacific island of Kiribati tops the list at 57 percent.

Australians consume the equivalent of 9.9 litres (2.6 US gallons) of pure alcohol per person per year according to the WHO, compared to 11.5 litres for Britons and 8.5 for Americans.

Estonia leads the measure with 16.2 litres per person per year.

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