

Chronic diseases taking up more of GPs' time

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GPs in Australia are working three hours less per week in direct clinical care, however they are dealing with more health problems per visit, research led by the University of Sydney shows.

Patients with Type 2 diabetes now account for 8 percent of a GP's workload, and they spend almost twice as much time with the GP," lead author Associate Professor Helena Britt from the Sydney School of Public Health said.

Two reports published today provide data on the activities of our GPs and the care of their patients. 'General practice activity in Australia 2012-13', from the Family Medicine Research Centre, University of Sydney, features a report of GP management of diabetes.

A companion report 'A decade of Australian general practice 2002-03 to 2012-13' shows the changes over the last decade in our reasons for seeing a GP, and what happens during these visits.

The data comes from the Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) program, which continuously collects information about clinical activities of GPs in Australia. Dr Helena Britt is director of the program.

"We are very lucky, Australia is one of the few countries in the world with regular reports of what's happening now in general practice, and how things have changed over time," she said.

"This allows us to measure the positive or negative impact of changes in [health](#) policy on the medical care provided. It also informs planning of future [health care services](#) in Australia."

In 2012-2013, Australians claimed 126.8 million GP services through Medicare. People with Type 2 diabetes visited a GP eight times a year on average, and their diabetes was managed at half of these visits.

"This is more than the average of 5.6 GP visits a year for the total population, and patients with diabetes have longer consultations than many others," Associate Professor Britt said.

"About 1.2 million people have diagnosed Type 2 diabetes, and 97 percent of them have at least one other chronic condition - 40 per cent have five or more. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, hypertension, osteoarthritis, ischaemic heart disease, and depression are the most common."

The study also shows that older patients are taking up an increasing proportion of GP services, and are giving more reasons for their visit than a decade ago.

"As the population ages, chronic diseases are accounting for an increasing proportion of GPs workload. Compared with ten years ago, there are now more visits for depression, [diabetes](#), atrial fibrillation, and hypothyroidism," Associate Professor Britt said.

Researchers also found that GPs made 7.6 million more referrals nationally in 2012-2013 than a decade ago, with about 3.7 million more to medical specialists, and 3.5 million more to allied health services.

"The increase in referrals to allied health suggests improved access to these services, probably because Medicare now subsidises some patient

visits to physiotherapists, psychologists and dieticians," Associate Professor Britt said.

More information: "A decade of Australian general practice activity 2003-04 to 2012-13." Britt H, Miller GC, Henderson J, Bayram C, Valenti L, Harrison C, Charles J, Pan Y, Zhang C, Pollack AJ, O'Halloran J. Sydney University Press: [ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitst...743323779 ONLINE.pdf](https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitst...743323779_ONLINE.pdf)

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