

Rich countries hit brake for health spending: OECD

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A third of the world's rich countries cut health spending between 2009 and 2011, according to a probe of 33 advanced economies published on Thursday.

Per-capita spending on health fell in 11 of these countries, notably by 11.1 percent in Greece and 6.6 percent in Ireland, while growth in spending slowed in others, including Canada (0.8 percent) and the United States (1.3 percent).

Just two countries—Israel and South Korea—saw an acceleration in the growth of health spending, compared with the previous decade, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said.

The report blamed [budget cuts](#) in austerity-hit countries for the drop in healthcare spending.

Main targets for spending restrictions were cutting prices of medicines, limiting wages in hospitals and scaling back budgets for prevention programmes, it said.

The report added that for the first time, the [average life expectancy](#) across the OECD exceeded 80 years—an increase of a decade from 1970 to 2011.

"This trend shows no sign of slowing down," it said.

"Those born in Switzerland, Japan and Italy can expect to live the longest among OECD countries."

But it also pointed to the widening prevalence of diabetes, obesity and dementia in the rich world.

"In 2011, close to seven percent of 20-79-year-olds in OECD countries, or close to 85 million people, had diabetes," said the report, entitled "Health At A Glance 2013."

"This number is likely to increase in the years ahead, given the high and often growing rates of obesity across the developed world."

The report also noted a burden from out-of-pocket [health](#) spending in some countries.

"On average in the OECD, 20 percent of [health spending](#) is paid directly by patients; this ranges from less than 10 percent in the Netherlands and France to over 35 percent in Chile, (South) Korea and Mexico."

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