

# GP health checks have impact on risk factors

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(Medical Xpress)—New research from the University of Adelaide suggests there are ongoing benefits in managing risk factors from annual GP health checks, amid growing international concern that such check-ups do not improve patients' health.

A paper published in the *British Medical Journal* and a Cochrane review in 2012 have both called into question the validity of annual health checks in the United Kingdom, saying there is no proof that they help to identify disease and extend people's lives. Based on this, there have been calls for all health checks in the UK's National Health Service to be stopped.

However, University of Adelaide researchers have now compared the outcomes of annual health checks performed in a general practice compared with those undertaken in the community or in a workplace.

The review, conducted by PhD student Si Si in the University's School of Population Health, has been published this month in the *British Journal of General Practice*. This is the first time research undertaken in different settings has been reviewed separately.

"We found that there is no evidence to suggest that health checks outside of general practice, for example at work or in local pharmacies, are doing what they're designed to - prevent disease and reduce mortality," says the leader of the study and Head of General Practice at the University, Professor Nigel Stocks.

"However, in our review, annual GP health checks were associated with a reduction in risk factors, such as blood pressure, cholesterol and weight. In addition, the number of people at high risk of [cardiovascular disease](#) was reduced.

"We believe these results reflect the type of care GPs provide to their patients, which is both comprehensive and ongoing. Improvements in [risk factors](#) lead to fewer people at high risk which will have benefits in the long term, even if there appears to be no immediate impact on life expectancy."

Currently the Australian Government pays for free annual GP health checks for people aged 75 and over, and for people aged 45-49 years old, who are at risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer.

Professor Stocks says annual health checks have become highly contentious in the UK and some countries in Europe, where there have been calls to stop them.

"In Australia there is growing awareness of these issues, and given the current political and economic climate the situation in the UK is likely to influence Australia's thinking on this matter," Professor Stocks says.

"But we believe it's much too early to make decisions without further evidence. We definitely should not scrap GP-based [health checks](#) in Australia, and the UK should look at the issue in some further detail," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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