

Multiple chronic disease doubles in Adelaide's north-west

July 1 2014, by Kate Bourne

Research from the University of Adelaide shows that the number of people in the north-western suburbs of Adelaide who suffer from more than one chronic disease has doubled in less than eight years.

In a follow-up to the North West Adelaide Health Study, which gathered data from more than 1800 people in 2000-2002, researchers have discovered that the prevalence of multiple chronic diseases (known as "multimorbidity") has jumped from 32% to 64%.

The results of this study, which have been published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, provide new insights into the kinds of chronic diseases that people with other disease may develop, and how commonly that occurs.

"From our initial study we knew that the prevalence of chronic diseases in this community was already high - almost one third of the sample group had more than one chronic disease. But the results of the follow up study have shown a rapid increase in multimorbidity in a relatively short period of time - almost two thirds of our sample population now has more than one chronic disease," says co-author Professor Robert Adams, Director of the Health Observatory in the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

"These changes in multimorbidity, and the rapid pace at which they have occurred, have implications for further research and for clinical care," he says.

The eight chronic diseases included in the study were: asthma; cardiovascular disease and stroke; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD); diabetes; mood and anxiety disorders; other mental health disorders; high blood cholesterol; and high blood pressure.

"The most commonly developed chronic diseases were high blood cholesterol levels and high blood pressure," Professor Adams says.

"The follow up study has highlighted that some specific [chronic diseases](#) are associated with the development of other disease. For example, people with asthma are much more likely to develop high [blood cholesterol](#) problems; and those with mood and anxiety disorders are much more likely to develop either asthma and other mental health conditions, or both.

"A large proportion of those suffering from mood and anxiety problems (18%) also developed diabetes during the follow up period. This provides a red flag to us to show that new strategies may be needed among those patients to help prevent diabetes."

More information: Ruel G, Lévesque J-F, Stocks N, Sirois C, Kroger E, et al. (2014) "Understanding the Evolution of Multimorbidity: Evidences from the North West Adelaide Health Longitudinal Study (NWAHS)." *PLoS ONE* 9(5): e96291. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0096291](#)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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