

Australians are living longer, but in need of more support

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A study of pre-COVID-19 health data has found that Australians over 70 are living longer, but their impact on the health care industry is increasing, according to research by the University of Adelaide.

The study, led by Dr. Liliana G. Ciobanu, and Head of the Psychiatry Discipline Associate Professor Scott R. Clark, was conducted by GBD Australia collaborators and examined Global Burden of Disease statistics from 1990 to 2019.

Their report [published](#) in *The Lancet Regional Health* estimated mortality, causes of death, years of life lost (YLLs), years lived with disability (YLDs), disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs), life expectancy at age 70 and above (LE-70), and healthy life expectancy (HALE-70) and compared them globally and with high socio-demographic index (SDI) groups.

In 2019, the LE-70 for men was 86 years, while women expect to live to 83.3 years, up 3.9 years for men and three years for women from 1990 figures.

Lead author Dr. Ciobanu noted that the overall increase in life expectancy is primarily attributed to improved longevity in males, specifically driven by a reduction of YLLs attributable to cardiovascular and [chronic respiratory diseases](#).

However, she expressed concern over the simultaneous rise in the absolute number of DALYs for this demographic, despite a general reduction in DALY rates. This alarming trend, representing a 72.4% increase from 1990 to 2019, underscores the growing burden on the health system due to the expanding older population.

"Further research should focus on targeted programs for support and intervention for these conditions, with the caveat that the landscape may have shifted with changes in care and population illness burden post-COVID," Dr. Ciobanu said.

"While some environmental and lifestyle risks are on the whole

decreasing, for instance smoking, others like climate instability are increasing and require urgent coordinated intervention."

The research also found that [ischemic heart disease](#), stroke, Alzheimer's disease, [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (COPD) and [lung cancer](#) were the top reasons for years lost from the average life expectancy.

"These findings establish pre-COVID baseline estimates for Australia's population aged 70 and above, informing health care preparedness," said Associate Professor Clark. "Particularly, we found increases in burden from [neurodegenerative diseases](#) such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, chronic renal disease and [prostate cancer](#), but most markedly, falls. For falls specifically, there is a need to review multifaceted strategies including factors like co-morbidity and the potential overuse of sedating medications.

"We would like to see the findings of this research informing policymaking and health care practices to address the evolving health care needs of the aging population in Australia."

The researchers now plan to evaluate post-COVID figures to determine the impact the pandemic has had on the health outcomes of older adults in Australia.

"We know COVID differentially affected older Australians in both mortality and anecdotally in access to and quality of care for chronic diseases," said Associate Professor Clark. "The impact on fatal and non-fatal burden will potentially have significant implications for aged care moving forward."

More information: Liliana G. Ciobanu et al, Pre-COVID life

expectancy, mortality, and burden of diseases for adults 70 years and older in Australia: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease 2019 Study, *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.lanwpc.2024.101092](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2024.101092)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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