

Gen X obesity a major problem for healthcare, workforce

27 March 2014, by David Ellis

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers at the University of Adelaide have confirmed that if current trends continue, Generation X will overtake Baby Boomers for poor health, including rates of obesity and diabetes, which could have huge implications for Australia's healthcare and the workforce.

In a paper published today in the online journal *PLOS ONE*, University of Adelaide researchers compared the [health status](#) of Baby Boomers (born from 1946-1965) and Generation X (1966-1980) at the same age range of 25-44 years.

They found Generation X had significantly poorer levels of self-rated health, and higher levels of obesity and diabetes compared with Boomers, with no real difference in [physical activity](#) between the two groups.

"Generation X appears to have developed both obesity and diabetes much sooner when compared with Baby Boomers, which is a major concern on a number of fronts," says co-author and University of Adelaide PhD student Rhiannon Pilkington, who is a member of the University's Population Research & Outcome Studies group, School of Medicine.

Generation X is more than twice as likely to be overweight or obese and have diabetes at 25 to 44 years of age, compared to Baby Boomers at the same age in 1989.

The prevalence of obesity in men is nearly double, with 18.3% of Generation X males obese compared to 9.4% of Baby Boomers at the same age. The gap is not as profound for women, with 12.7% of Generation X females classified as obese compared to 10.7% of Baby Boomers at the same age.

"This study adds to the growing evidence world wide suggesting that each younger generation is developing obesity and related chronic health conditions earlier in life," Ms Pilkington says.

"Although the two groups in our study did not seem to have any difference in levels of physical activity, our lifestyles and food environments have changed drastically over recent decades.

"Transport options and workplaces encourage sedentary behaviour, and food high in fat and sugar is often more readily available than a healthier alternative. This may account for why the younger generation is developing unhealthy weight levels at an earlier age," she says.

Ms Pilkington says that together, Baby Boomers and Gen X form almost 77% of Australia's workforce.

"There is the potential for obesity-related health problems to propel many from the workforce early, or to drastically reduce their ability to work. If ongoing generations continue down this path of developing what were once considered to be age-related conditions earlier in life, the consequences for healthcare costs will be enormous."

More information: Pilkington R, Taylor AW, Hugo G, Wittert G (2014) "Are Baby Boomers Healthier than Generation X? A Profile of Australia's Working Generations Using National Health Survey Data." *PLoS ONE* 9(3): e93087. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0093087](#)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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