

Health and Human Development
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 4: Health Status

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Health Status

The overall health status of Australians is very good. Australians have access to a high standard of healthcare and through Medicare, have one of the best health systems in the world, resulting in Australians being one of the healthiest populations in the world. The level of health in Australia can be linked to information in the community about health and the vast network of health services which has continued to improve to provide prevention, early intervention and treatment of diseases (a combination of biomedical, preventative and social model of health).

Defining Health Status

As it appears in Units 1, 2 and 3

The definition of health status remains unchanged across Units 1, 2 and 3. Each Unit focuses on the health status of different groups, but the overall concept of health status is consistent.

Health status is defined as an individual's or a population's overall health, taking into account various aspects such as life expectancy, amount of disability and levels of disease risk factors. Health status is influenced by the determinants of health, including biological factors such as body weight and blood pressure, behavioural factors such as dietary intake and alcohol use and social factors such as occupation and socio-economic status.

Review Questions

1. Health status can be used to assess the health of individuals and population groups.
 - a. Briefly outline how the health status of population groups is measured.

- b. Why is it important to measure the health status of population groups?

2. The health status of individuals and populations is influenced by amongst other factors, the level of disability.

a. What is meant by the term 'disability'? Use examples to support your answer.

b. Select one the examples from Question 2a and describe how the condition contributes to disability.

3. List five ways that health status can be measured.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.

Measuring Health Status

As it appears in Units 1, 2 and 3

The health status of Australians can be measured by interpreting population trends via a range of statistical measures such as life expectancy, burden of disease, morbidity and mortality rates, DALY and HALE and the incidence and prevalence of disease. These terms are defined below.

Mortality - refers to the death rate in the population. The data calculates the number of deaths, their causes, the average age of deaths.

Another measure of mortality is the death rate that measures the proportion of a population who die in a period of one year from a specific condition.

There are also specialised death rates such as the **infant mortality rate**, which measures the number of deaths of children under 1 year of age per 1000 live births. **Under-five mortality rate** refers to the number of deaths occurring in children under the age of 5 years-old; usually represented as a number per 1000 live births in a given population.

Morbidity - refers to the level or rate of illness, disease, injury and disability in a population that reduces quality of life.

Life expectancy – the number of years an individual is expected to live if current death rates do not change.

Burden of disease – refers to the impact of a particular disease or condition on an individual, community or population in relation to morbidity, injury, disability and premature mortality. The burden of disease is measured using DALYs.

Disability adjusted life years – is a measure of the years of life lost (YLL) due to premature death and impact of disability (YLD). One DALY is a lost year of healthy life. DALY is calculated per particular diseases or condition.

$$\text{DALY} = \text{YLL (years life lost)} + \text{YLD (years lost due to disability)}$$

DALY is aimed at providing a more accurate picture of health status within a population as it combines the impact of both morbidity (disability) and mortality (death).

Health adjusted life expectancy or HALE refers to the number of years in full health that a newborn can expect to live. HALE is the number of years an individual can expect to live with the absence of disease, disability or injury.

Incidence refers to the number of new cases of a particular disease or condition in a community or population within a given time.

Prevalence refers to the number or proportion of cases of a particular disease or condition present in a community or population at any given time.

Trend refers to a pattern developing over a period of time, for example the trend in IMR has decreased over the past decade.

Solutions to Review Questions

1.

- a. Health status is measured by collecting data on a range of health indicators, including life expectancy, death rates, causes of death, self-reported health information and collation of causes of hospitalisation.
- b. The health status of populations is measured to identify areas of health concern and then developing health promotion programs and strategies to address these concerns. For example, the high rate of CVD resulted in the Heart Foundation developing the *Heart of the Tick* program to help reduce the level of CVD in the population. This information can also be used to conduct research into new technologies, such as preventative screenings for types of cancer.

2.

- a. Disability in the context of health status refers to the impact of any illness or condition which reduces quality of life and decreases the level of productivity for an individual and population. Conditions which contribute to disability include osteoporosis, depression, obesity and Type 2 diabetes.
- b. The following is a sample response for obesity: obesity contributes to disability by preventing an individual from performing daily tasks to their full potential, such as reducing physical fitness may prevent an obese individual from doing tasks such as gardening or mowing the lawn. The community may be affected by an individual being too obese to gain employment.

3. Health status can be measured by life expectancy, morbidity and mortality rates, incidence and prevalence of disease, DALY and HAIs and overall burden of disease.

4.

Burden of disease refers to the impact of a disease or condition on the health of individuals or the population. Burden of disease is measured using DALY.

- b. Calculated by combining the impact of YLL (premature years of life lost) and YLD (years lost to disability). This provides a more accurate picture of the impact of a disease or condition.

5.

- a. IMR refers to infant mortality rate. This is the death rate (usually out of 1000) for infants, which is defined as a child under 1 year of age. An IMR of 5/1000 means that 5 infants out of every 1000 live births die.
- b. U5MR refers to under 5 mortality rate. This is the death rate (usually out of 1000) for children under the age of 5 years. A U5MR of 7/1000 means that out of every 1000 live births 7 children will die before they reach the age of 5 years.