

Health Determinants

Queensland 2004

Health Service Cairns District



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HEALTH DETERMINANTS QUEENSLAND 2004

Chapter 6. CAIRNS HEALTH SERVICE DISTRICT

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Health Determinants Queensland 2004

Chapter 1 Whole of population

Chapter 2 Children

Chapter 3 Young people

Chapter 4 Older people

Chapter 5 Indigenous peoples

Chapter 6 Health service district profiles

Companion documents

Health Determinants Queensland 2004 at a glance

Health Determinants Queensland 2004: Statistical report.

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Foreword

The health of the people of Queensland is very good overall and continues to improve. However, recent declines in the amount of physical activity undertaken, poor nutrition, an increase in overweight and obesity, as well as high levels of smoking and alcohol misuse, tell us that this is not a time for complacency. In addition, the increasing inequalities in health and the poor health of Indigenous peoples require specific attention.

In order for us to address these issues, Queensland Health and others whose work impacts on health and wellbeing, need to focus on the areas that will have the greatest gains for all Queenslanders. Information is critical to enable us to make decisions about where to focus and invest.

Health Determinants Queensland 2004 is a key resource in this regard. It provides a summary of the most important factors influencing the health status of Queenslanders today and the areas of potential gain, and highlights the key responses needed to address them. This report brings together indicators of the major behavioural, social, economic and environmental determinants of health and their recent trends in Queensland. In doing so, it provides valuable guidance to government, non-government agencies and the community for improving health and reducing the burden of disease tomorrow and into the future.

It is absolutely clear that the influences on the health of Queenslanders go well beyond the scope of health agencies. All parts of society are and need to be engaged in the effort. Promoting and sustaining the health of the public is one of the most important functions of government and Queensland Health's new strategic intention highlights this.

Our mission is to promote a healthier Queensland. Our vision is to be leaders in health and partners for life. We will be successful in promoting a healthier Queensland through acting on following five strategic intents:

- Healthier staff – optimise staffing levels, provide staff with the right knowledge and skills, and provide an environment that values their experience and which supports positive ideas to drive innovation, creativity and health enhancements
- Healthier partnerships – work with others to harmonise programs and activities that impact on health
- Healthier people and communities – promote healthier lifestyles and environments for individuals, families and communities and improve community-based chronic disease management
- Healthier hospitals – provide high quality and equitable acute emergency care, integrated with enhanced community-based services
- Healthier resources – use finite resources to maximum advantage.

Health Determinants Queensland provides an information basis from which we can make informed decisions about how to best action each of these intents – what initiatives need to be implemented in which areas to achieve the greatest possible gains in health.

I encourage everyone with an interest in health – which is all of us – to familiarise yourself with the information in this report and to use this information in planning priority setting, and decisions about resource allocation.

Dr Steve Buckland
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6.1 Health Determinants Queensland 2004

Health Determinants Queensland 2004 (HDQ) reports indicators of the major behavioural, social, economic and environmental determinants of health in the state. Where possible, it reports key trends in these indicators. Outcome indicators of preventable health issues are also reported. The report describes the relationship between the determinants of health and their outcomes. Queensland population groups with excess mortality and morbidity associated with conditions and determinants are also identified.

A determinant of health is a factor or characteristic that brings about a change in health, either for the better or for the worse. Health determinants can be broadly divided into 'upstream' determinants (education, employment, income, living and working conditions), 'midstream' (community capacity, health behaviours and psychosocial factors) and 'downstream' (physiological and biological factors).¹ The social, cultural, economic and environmental factors are collectively called 'social determinants of health and wellbeing'.

The five population based chapters of HDQ reflect the life course approach and the age specific nature of many health determinants and outcomes. The *Whole of population* chapter reports the determinants of health which affect the entire population, key health outcomes and interventions to address these determinants. The *Children, Young people, Older people* and *Indigenous peoples* chapters reflect the health determinants of specific relevance to those populations. Population-specific interventions to address these determinants are described.

The *Health service district profiles* chapter comprises a suite of 34 profiles, one for each of the population based Health Service Districts (HSDs) in Queensland. The Cairns HSD profile is one of that suite.

6.2 What is the aim of this profile?

This profile provides Cairns HSD with a summary of the key health issues and their causes, in the total population and in subpopulations within the district.

Information on the prevalence of risk and protective factors for health is required to determine the level of need in the population, and to measure the effectiveness of services. With rapidly changing populations in many parts of Queensland, and specifically an ageing population, strategic prevention initiatives are critically needed.

Health Determinants Queensland 2004 supports decision makers at the local level in identifying priority areas for prevention and evidence based interventions for investment. It provides information for planning to strategically address the current, and short and long term future burden of disease in the Cairns HSD.

6.3 An introduction to small area analysis

The health status of the people of Cairns HSD can be considered in two ways.

- What are the major determinants of health, death and disease?
- Are the health issues of the people of this district different to other populations in Queensland? That is, what is the relative health status of this population?

The major determinants of health, death and disease, and the health status of the total Queensland population are reported in other chapters of *Health Determinants Queensland 2004* and in earlier publications.^{2,3,4,5,6} This information provides a good base for understanding the general health issues affecting this district's population.

Regarding the relative health status of this population, this is of critical concern, as the impact of changing sociodemographic patterns and the effect of lifestyle behaviours on demand for health services is experienced in the district currently and in the future.

In order to determine the relative health status of the district population, knowledge of the health status of this and other districts in Queensland is required. However, at HSD level and smaller, mortality and morbidity information is not always available. In addition, where this information is available, it has some inherent problems which can lead to difficulties with interpretation and possibly the development of misinformation.⁷ These difficulties with small area analysis mostly stem from the relatively small number of cases reported for many conditions in smaller populations, with variation in numbers of cases, deaths or behaviours due to unexpected or non-representative events.

An estimation method has been adopted to address this problem and is used in this profile. This method relies on the fact that the health status of a population is largely predicted by sociodemographic

characteristics of that population.^{8,9} The key sociodemographic predictors of health status of a population are the age structure, sex distribution, proportion of Indigenous people and socioeconomic profile, and to a lesser extent urban, rural or remote location. Cultural diversity also needs to be considered.

The relative health status of people living in the Cairns HSD can be estimated from knowledge of:

- key sociodemographic characteristics of the population in the district and Queensland
- the distribution of health outcomes and determinants in these sociodemographic groups in Queensland, as described in *Health Determinants Queensland 2004*.

This methodology is detailed in section 1.6 of *Whole of population* chapter and in other Queensland Health documents.⁷ While this estimation method provides broad indications of health status in the population, complementary local knowledge will enhance the interpretation of this information and the understanding of its significance to the local population.

Population groups are not homogenous in regards to health issues. Thus, the key issues for population groups are interdependent. Prevalence of health outcomes and determinants are the result of complex interactions between the sociodemographic variables of the population. Key interactions are between: Indigenous status, socioeconomic disadvantage, and to a lesser extent rural or remote location; and between all populations and socioeconomic disadvantage. That is, older people who live in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas have greater health needs than those living in socioeconomically advantaged areas. A similar observation holds for Indigenous people, where the impact of Indigenous status, socioeconomic disadvantage, and rural and remote locations are interwoven. In addition, other interactions occur within district population groups. For example, Indigenous children and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are at greater risk of developing untoward health outcomes such as diabetes, than other children.

6.4 Who lives in Cairns HSD and how will that change?

The key sociodemographic predictors of health are described for Cairns HSD, using data from the 2001 census of population and housing, and population projections where available (Table CA 6.2).

In summary, compared to Queensland, Cairns HSD has:

- a higher proportion of adults in the age range 25 to 49 years and projected to increase
- population growth to affect all age groups especially adult and older age groups
- a higher proportion of Indigenous people
- a culturally diverse population

Within the boundaries of the district, the sociodemographic distribution of the population varies considerably. Specifically, some areas of the HSD have a higher proportion of young children aged 0-4 years (Figure CA 6.2), children aged 5-14 years (Figure CA 6.3), young people aged 15-24 years (Figure CA 6.4), older people aged 65 years and older (Figure CA 6.5). The location of Indigenous people (Figure CA 6.6) and areas of greater socioeconomic disadvantage (Figure CA 6.7) also varies across the district. Many areas have greater proportions of a number of these population groups, including older people and Indigenous peoples living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Depending upon the sociodemographic mix of the local population as shown in these figures, the health status and specifically the likely prevalence of determinants of health, will vary within the district. This same estimation model can be applied to identify areas within the district at greater health risk.

In this profile, unless otherwise noted, the following age range definitions apply; children are 0-14 years, young people aged 15-24 years, adults are 25-64 years and older people are 65 years and older.

Age and sex distribution

In 2002, the population of Cairns HSD was 138,551, which was 3.7% of the Queensland population (Table CA 6.2). Compared to the Queensland population there were proportionally more adults in the age range 25 to 49 years in the district in 2002 (Figure CA 6.1).

Population growth

Cairns HSD is an area with a recent history of modest population growth. However in the 20-year period between 1996 and 2016, this district is projected to be the fourth most rapidly growing population, with a

50% increase during this period. This growth is projected to affect all age groups although compared to other HSDs in Queensland proportional growth in adult and older populations will be greatest (Table CA 6.2).

These projections are based on data derived from the 1996 census.¹⁰ Projected population growth using the 2001 census, for Queensland and at Local Government Area level have been reported,¹¹ but are currently not available for health service districts.

Indigenous population

In 2001, there were 13,467 Indigenous people in the district, representing 9.5% of the total district population and 11.9% of Queensland's Indigenous population. In Queensland, 3.1% of the population identified as Indigenous in 2001.¹²

Socioeconomic disadvantage

The socioeconomic profile of Cairns HSD showed that compared to Queensland, the district had a smaller proportion of people living in areas of relative disadvantage (6.4% or about 9,000 people compared with 20% in Queensland). There were about 35,000 people living in areas of relative advantage (24.5% compared with 20% of Queenslanders). Using the 2001 Index of Relative Socioeconomic Advantage/Disadvantage,¹³ a profile of socioeconomic disadvantage includes variables for unemployment, lower income and level of skilled occupations and a profile of advantage includes variables for higher individual and household income, skilled and professional occupations and employment.

In 1996, following the pattern in all HSDs in Queensland, the Indigenous population in this HSD were more likely to live in areas of greater socioeconomic disadvantage than the non-Indigenous population.⁴

Cultural diversity

There were relatively more people who spoke a language other than English at home in Cairns HSD; 8.7% compared with 7.1% for the state.¹⁴

Of those people who spoke a language other than English at home, Creole and Pidgin languages, Australian Indigenous languages, Italian, Japanese and German were the most common languages spoken. Creole and Pidgin speakers, Indigenous language speakers and Japanese speaking people are generally younger (median age 25-29 years) while Italian and German speaking people in the district are relatively older (45-49 years and 40-44 years respectively). This compares with the English speaking population, with a median age of 30-34 years. The age profile of the culturally diverse populations in Cairns were generally younger than Queensland for equivalent language populations.

6.5 What are the key health issues and their causes?

Considering the whole population in the Cairns HSD, the major causes of death and illness include: Coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), depression and lung cancer (Table CA 6.3).

Health determinants of significant impact in this population include: harmful alcohol consumption, smoking, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and risk and protective factors for mental health.

A complete list of health outcomes and determinants of particular importance in each population group in Cairns HSD are in Table CA 6.3.

The social determinants of health vary for each population group, and are not detailed in this profile. These determinants are described in each population-based chapter of *Health Determinants Queensland 2004*. The social determinants of health will vary between areas of the district. For example, socioeconomic disadvantage in one area may be reflected in poor employment options while in other areas it may be reflected in low disposable incomes, or lack of health awareness and general education.

Higher proportion of adults and projected to increase

The major causes of death and illness for adults will include: CHD, COPD, suicide and self-inflicted injuries, diabetes and lung cancer.

Health determinants of significant impact in this population will include: smoking, harmful alcohol consumption, overweight and obesity and risk and protective factors for mental health. The social determinants of health of specific importance in this population are employment, income, housing and family relationships.

Increased proportion of older people in future

The major causes of death and illness for older people will include: CHD, stroke, Alzheimer and other dementias, COPD, diabetes, and lung and colorectal cancer.

Health determinants of significant impact in this population will include: poor diabetes management, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, poor blood cholesterol management, and smoking. In addition, falls are of particular concern in this population. Risk and protective factors for mental health are likely to have widespread effects on physical and mental health. Social determinants of health are of specific importance in this population, particularly housing, transport and social isolation.

These health issues will be exacerbated where older people are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Indigenous population

Due to the excess burden of disease in Indigenous peoples in Queensland in urban, rural and remote parts of the state, specific health gains can be made through targeted interventions in this district. Indigenous peoples in this HSD were more likely to live in areas of greater socioeconomic disadvantage than the non-Indigenous population.

The major causes of death and illness for Indigenous peoples include: stroke, CHD, diabetes, suicide, unintentional injury and mental health.

Health determinants of significant impact in this population include: poor diabetes management, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, harmful alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, poor blood cholesterol management, and risk and protective factors for mental health. In addition, rates of cervical cancer screening and asthma management are projected to be low in this population. Social determinants of health are of specific importance in this population, particularly sense of control, housing, employment and transport.

Socioeconomic disadvantage in the district

In general, socioeconomically disadvantaged people experience poorer health and shorter life expectancy than more socioeconomically advantaged people, for nearly all disease causes and populations studied.

The major causes of death and illness for populations of high socioeconomic disadvantage compared to those of low socioeconomic disadvantage include higher rates of: diabetes, intentional and unintentional injuries and mental disorders.

Health determinants of significant impact in this population include: diabetes management, harmful alcohol consumption, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and risk and protective factors for mental health.

Socioeconomic disadvantage is evident in this district, and while the instrument for measuring disadvantage lacks sensitivity in terms of pinpointing individual age groups, it would be expected that all age groups would be affected. The impact of disadvantage in children may be seen in a growing prevalence of physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition and oral health. This pattern is also likely to be seen in young people with the uptake of smoking and hazardous alcohol consumption setting up patterns for long term health burden. Smoking prevalence plus overweight and obesity, lack of fruit and vegetables in the diet, harmful alcohol consumption and insufficient physical activity during the adult years will combine to produce higher rates of the chronic disease burden of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancers. Socioeconomic disadvantage will be reflected in health determinants such as unemployment, transport difficulties, lack of affordable housing and a greater reliance on Queensland Health services.

Culturally and linguistically diverse populations

The health status of the Italian, Japanese and German speaking people, and other culturally and linguistically diverse populations within Queensland or this district is largely unknown. However, the age profile of the population will provide some broad guidelines to the health issues of concern. In addition, the social needs of these populations will need to be considered and will rely on more detailed local knowledge.

6.6 How many people are at risk?

An extension of estimating prevalence of health determinants of Cairns HSD is the estimation of the number of residents with specific key conditions (Table CA 6.1). The attributable burden of disease, the preventability of the conditions and the availability of data, were the basis for selecting the conditions to estimate case numbers.

Table CA 6.1: Estimated number of current residents with specific key conditions in Cairns HSD, by sex

Condition and age group	Estimated case number	
	males	females
Diabetic adults, aged 25 years and older	3,000	3,000
Overweight adults, aged 20 years and older	20,000	12,000
Obese adults, aged 20 years and older	10,000	11,000
Overweight children, aged 5-14 years	1,100	1,600
Obese children, aged 5-14 years	400	700
Asthmatic children, aged 0-9 years	1,000	700

6.7 How can the burden of disease be addressed?

Specific interventions to address the burden of disease in a population should target diseases, conditions and determinants of health which pose significant threat and are potentially preventable. There is now good evidence that a range of interventions are effective in preventing disease, illness and injury, and in promoting health and wellbeing through action on the determinants of health and ill health.

The key challenge is to ensure these initiatives are ongoing and widespread, and, are at a level sufficient to achieve broad based population-wide outcomes, as well as reduce health inequalities across population subgroups. Evidence based interventions to address these issues in each population are detailed in section 1.5 of the *Whole of population* chapter and in equivalent sections in other chapters of *Health Determinants Queensland 2004*.

Since population health issues are being addressed by multiple organisations and communities, the aim of these intervention sections is to identify key evidence based strategies that are currently being undertaken, are planned or are required. These strategies are based upon best practice. The interventions will be led by a variety of organisations in partnership with other sectors.

It is clear there are no simple, quick fixes to these complex issues. Action on all determinants requires multi-strategy approaches which:

- include both population-wide and at-risk group approaches
- involve sectors working together
- focus on both risk and protective factors
- address social, behavioural, economic and environmental factors
- specifically address equity and reduce disparities by focusing on the needs of the most disadvantaged communities and population groups
- take a lifecourse perspective.

The risk of disease is not confined to a particular group of the population with particularly high levels of risk factors. Rather, the risk of many diseases increases with increasing levels of risk factors, from levels within the normal range to very high levels of risk factors.¹⁵ In particular, there is a continuous association between:

- risk of coronary heart disease and healthy and excess weight (as assessed by body mass index),¹⁶ serum cholesterol,¹⁶ fruit and vegetable intake¹⁷ and diastolic blood pressure¹⁶
- risk of diabetes and healthy and excess weight¹⁶
- risk of haemorrhagic and ischaemic stroke and healthy and excess levels of diastolic blood pressure¹⁸
- risk of hip fracture and bone mineral density¹⁶
- risk of neural tube defects and maternal plasma folate.¹⁶

Thus incremental change in the population prevalence of these health determinants will affect the health status of the population in Cairns HSD.

Considerable evidence indicates that current greater prevalence of determinants of ill-health will result in higher hospital separations and mortality in the population in the short and long term. There is a variable and often long lag time between the incidence of health determinants and hospital separation or deaths from associated diseases or conditions. As a result, the excess prevalence of some health determinants in Cairns HSD will be partially reflected in current mortality and morbidity statistics, and partially reflected in future statistics.

6.8 Priorities for prevention in Cairns HSD

Addressing the burden of disease in Cairns HSD requires interventions that positively modify the diseases, conditions and health determinants that pose significant preventable burden for the population. Priority health determinants may include those for which prevalence is higher in the HSD than that of Queensland. However, interventions should also be implemented at the small area level if those conditions or risk factors have similar or lower prevalence than that of Queensland, but have a large impact within the small area.

Social determinants of health, particularly sense of control, employment and housing must be addressed to achieve sustained health improvement in this HSD. In addition, environments that support healthy lifestyles must be developed and maintained. Intersectorial partnerships are needed to affect these upstream determinants of health.

It is estimated that currently population groups within this HSD have a higher prevalence of some health behaviours than Queensland as a whole (Table CA 6.3). These key health determinants or preventable morbidity factors are:

- overweight and obesity
- physical inactivity
- poor diabetes management
- poor asthma management
- tobacco smoking
- risk and protective factors for mental health
- hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption.

In addition, specific interventions to address those determinants of health in this population which pose significant preventable burden for the population, but whose prevalence is similar or lower than that of Queensland are:

- falls in older people

The relative priority of key health determinants and preventable morbidity factors may change in the future as the population changes.

Population health interventions to address the burden of disease attributable to these health determinants are identified for the whole of the population and for sociodemographic groups, within the relevant chapters of the *Health Determinants Queensland 2004*.