Total health spending accounted for 9.3% of GDP in Brazil in 2012, which is also the average among OECD countries. Health spending as a share of GDP among OECD countries is highest in the United States, which spent 16.9% of its GDP on health in 2012.

Health spending tends to rise with incomes, and generally countries with higher GDP per capita also tend to spend more on health. It is not surprising, therefore, that Brazil ranks below the OECD average in terms of health expenditure per capita, with spending of 1109 USD in 2012 (calculated based on purchasing power parity), compared with an OECD average of 3484 USD.
The public sector is the main source of health funding in nearly all OECD countries. In Brazil, 46% of health spending was funded by public sources in 2012, much lower than the average of 72% in OECD countries. The public share of health spending in Brazil is also slightly lower than in the United States (48%), Chile (49%) and Mexico (51%), the three OECD countries with the lowest public share. But in the United States, private health insurance accounts for a much larger share of private spending than in Brazil, where most private spending is paid directly out-of-pocket.

Resources in the health sector

In 2010 (latest year available), Brazil had 1.8 physicians per 1000 population, well below the OECD average of 3.2 in 2012. There were only about 1.5 nurses per 1000 population in Brazil in 2010, compared with an OECD average of 8.8 in 2012.

The number of hospital beds in Brazil was 2.3 per 1000 population in 2012, about half the OECD average (4.8 beds). As in most OECD countries, the number of hospital beds per capita in Brazil has fallen over time (down from 2.9 beds per 1000 population in 2000), coinciding with a reduction in average length of stays in hospitals.

Health status and risk factors

Most countries have enjoyed large gains in life expectancy over the past decades, thanks to improvements in living conditions, public health interventions and progress in medical care. Life expectancy at birth in Brazil has increased by 19 years since 1960 to reach 73.7 years in 2012, although it still remains 6 ½ years lower than the OECD average (80.2 years).

The infant mortality rate in Brazil has fallen greatly over the past two decades, coming down from 51.6 deaths per 1000 live births in 1990 to 12.9 deaths in 2012. Nonetheless, it remains much higher than the OECD average of 4.0 deaths per 1000 births.

Obesity rates have increased in recent decades in all OECD countries. In Brazil, the obesity rate among adults, based on self-reported data, was 18% in 2012, slightly higher than the OECD average (15%). Obesity’s growing prevalence foreshadows increases in the occurrence of health problems (such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases), and higher health care costs in the future.

More information on OECD Health Statistics 2014 is available at www.oecd.org/health/healthdata. For more information on OECD's work on Brazil, please visit www.oecd.org/brazil.