



## Australia needs to tackle its rising levels of obesity, says OECD

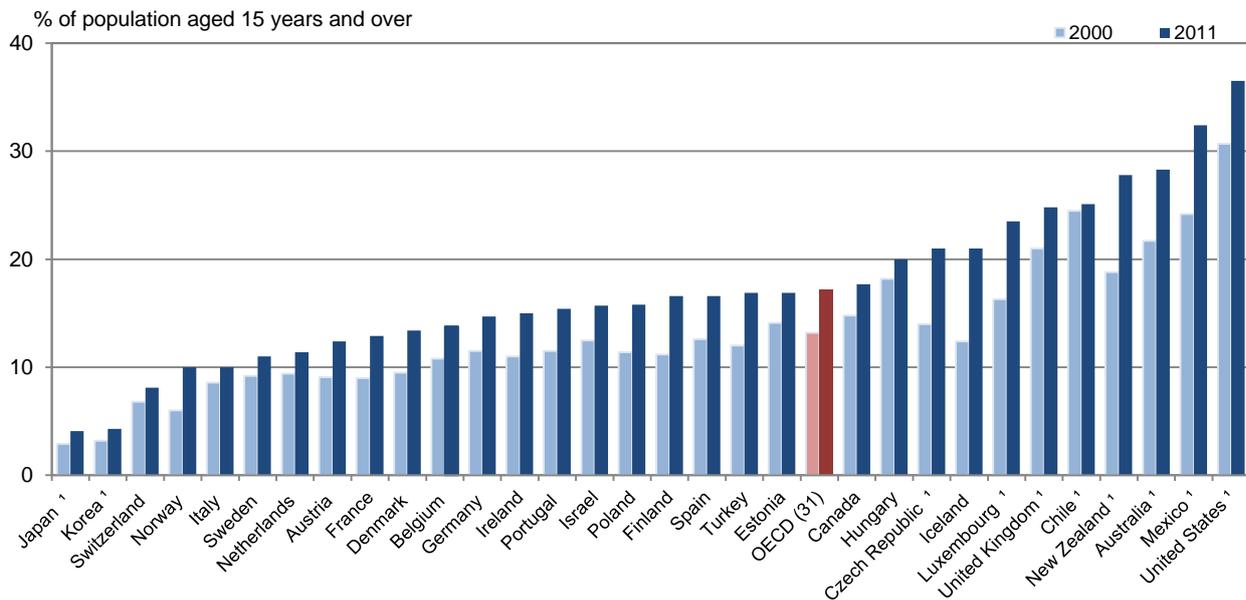
Australians continue to enjoy one of the highest levels of health across the developed world but need to address Australia’s growing obesity problem, according to a new OECD report.

**Health at a Glance 2013** states that life expectancy at birth now stands at 82 years in Australia; almost 2 years above the average life expectancy of the 34 OECD countries.

Australians also enjoy good access to a high quality health care system. It consistently rates among the top five countries in terms of survival after being diagnosed with cancer or after suffering acute myocardial infarction (heart attack). These good outcomes are achieved at a reasonable price, with Australians spending 8.9% of their GDP on health compared to an OECD average of 9.3%.

But Australian state and federal governments face considerable challenges if they want to improve their population’s health, most notably on high levels of obesity. Australia has among the highest rates of adult obesity in the world at 28.3%, behind the United States (36.5%), Mexico (32.4%) and New Zealand (28.4%) but ahead of the United Kingdom (24.8%) and Ireland (23%). Obesity is a leading cause of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Governments need to invest in cost-effective strategies to reverse the obesity epidemic.

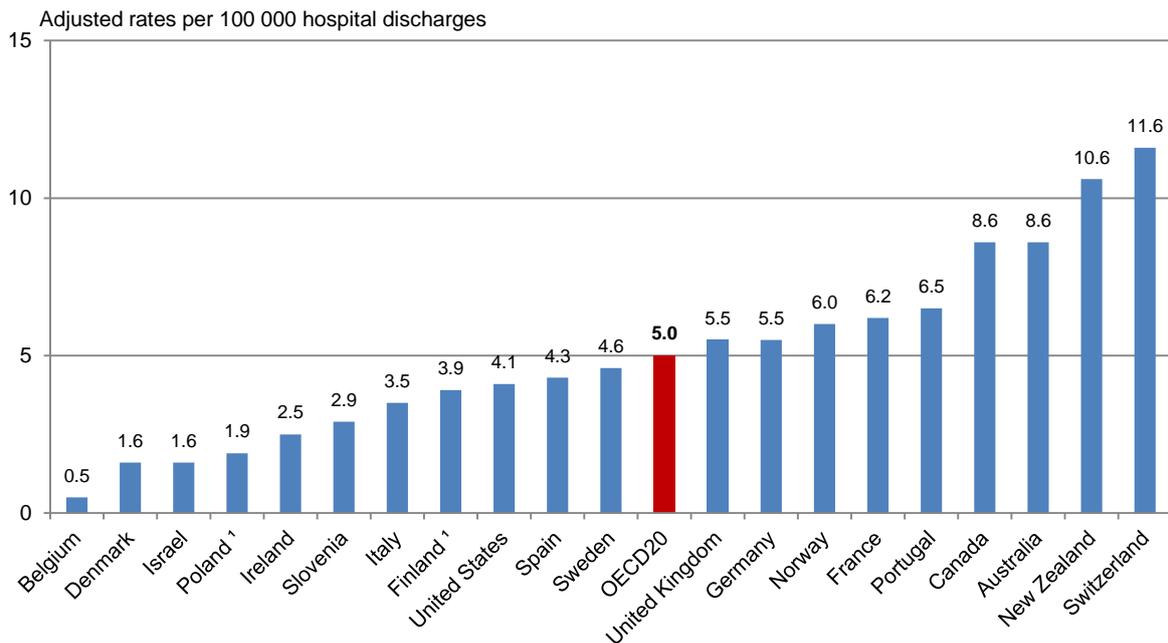
### Increasing obesity among adults in OECD countries, 2000 and 2011 (or nearest year)



1. Data are based on measurements rather than self-reported height and weight.  
Source: OECD, Health at a Glance 2013

**Health at a Glance 2013** also notes Australia’s comparatively higher numbers of adverse events during hospitalisation. For example, the number of occurrences where a foreign body is accidentally left in after a surgical procedure is 8.6 per 100 000 hospital discharges in Australia, compared to the OECD average of five. These figures may signal better reporting of such events and support the need for organisations such as the *Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care* to continue to put patient safety at the centre of healthcare management, funding and policy.

## Foreign body left in during procedure in adults, 2011 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD, Health at a Glance 2013

The data also shows that Australia is experiencing a substantial expansion of its medical workforce, coinciding with the rise in the number of medical graduates. This will improve access to health care but is placing stress on current training capacity and will put pressure on future health care budgets as more graduates enter the medical workforce.

These data are derived from the latest edition of *Health at a Glance* published by the Paris-based OECD. This report brings together international data on wide range of health topics including health outcomes, health care access, resources and quality as well as expenditure.

Journalists can download the report from the OECD's protected site or contact the OECD Media Division (tel. + 33 1 45 24 97 00). For any question about the content of the publication, journalists are invited to contact Mark Pearson, Head of the OECD Health Division, who will be in Australia from 17 November to 21 November, and available for comment (tel. 33 16 03 82 73 31 or [mark.pearson@oecd.org](mailto:mark.pearson@oecd.org)) or Kees van Gool (tel. 33 1 45 24 99 37 or [kees.vangool@oecd.org](mailto:kees.vangool@oecd.org)).

More information is also available at [www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance](http://www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance).