Spain has the highest life expectancy among all EU countries, with life expectancy at birth reaching 83.3 years in 2014, more than two years above the EU average (80.9 years). The steady gains in life expectancy in Spain are remarkable, but as people are living longer, they also in many cases live with one or more chronic conditions. More than half (55%) of the remaining years of life of people at age 65 are lived with some disabilities, increasing demands for health and long-term care.

Spain needs to pursue its efforts to prevent risk factors to health and reduce health inequalities

While Spain has achieved progress in reducing some important risk factors to health, such as smoking and alcohol consumption, there is still room for further progress to move closer to the best performers in the EU in many areas. In 2014, 23% of Spanish adults were still smoking daily, which is down from 32% in 2000, but nonetheless remains above the EU average (21%) and is almost two-times greater than the current rate in Sweden (12%). As in all other countries, more men than women smoke in Spain, but the gender gap is less important. This means that the smoking rate among women is greater than in most other EU countries. On the positive side, smoking rates among 15-year-old girls and boys in Spain were amongst the lowest in the EU in 2013/14.
As in other countries, overweight and obesity problems among children and adults represent a growing public health issue in Spain. More than one in six adults in Spain is now obese (16.7% in 2014), up from one in eight in 2000 (12.6%), and according to the latest wave of the Health Behaviour is School-Aged Children, 20% of 15-year-olds children in Spain were overweight or obese in 2013-14, the third highest rate after Malta and Greece. Overweight problems in childhood and adolescence increase greatly the risk of being obese in adulthood.

There are huge social disparities in obesity rates in Spain as in other countries. The obesity rate among adults in Spain is more than two-times greater amongst people with the lowest level of education compared with those with the highest level of education (23% versus 10% in 2014). OECD work has shown that effective intervention packages to tackle obesity include a mix of provision of information (e.g. mass media campaigns), regulatory actions (e.g. regulation of advertisement of unhealthy products) and counselling by family doctors.

Spain needs to renew its efforts to increase vaccination coverage against influenza amongst elderly people

The percentage of people aged over 65 vaccinated against influenza in Spain remains higher than in most other EU countries, but it has fallen markedly over the past decade as in many other EU countries. Whereas close to 70% of people aged over 65 in Spain were vaccinated against influenza in 2004, this proportion came down to 56% in 2014. This reduction in the vaccination coverage has moved Spain away from achieving the target of 75% coverage set by both WHO and a 2009 EU Council Recommendation. Lower vaccination coverage increases the risk for elderly people to get influenza and related complications that might lead to more hospitalisations or even deaths.

More information on Health at a Glance: Europe 2016 – State of Health in the EU cycle is available at http://www.oecd.org/health/health-at-a-glance-europe-23056088.htm. Health at a Glance: Europe 2016 is the first step in new joint work between the OECD and the EC under the Commission’s new State of Health in the EU cycle. This publication will be followed by the preparation of more in-depth country health profiles, expected to be released in November 2017.