

# Leading causes of death and illness in Australia



Below is a table showing the leading causes of death in Australia, along with the prevalence of these diseases in the community.

This information highlights the importance of considering these probabilities, especially if lifestyle choices and hereditary or genetic factors increase one's risk.

Disease and cause	Examples	Deaths 2023 <sup>1</sup>	Prevalence 2023	Earliest detection age	Did you know
<b>1. Cardiovascular disease:</b> Cardiovascular disease (CVD) refers to a group of disorders of the heart and blood vessels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ischaemic heart diseases.</li> <li>• Cerebrovascular diseases</li> <li>• Heart failure</li> <li>• Cardiac arrhythmias</li> <li>• Hypertensive diseases</li> </ul> Includes: heart attack and stroke	35,705	4.5 million <sup>2</sup>	Symptoms can be detected as early as <b>30-40 years old</b> , especially if there are risk factors like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or a family history of heart disease. <sup>3</sup>	High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is often called the "silent killer" because it typically has no symptoms but can lead to serious cardiovascular complications. <sup>4</sup>
<b>2. Cancer cells in the body:</b> These cells can invade nearby tissues and form tumours, and they can also spread to other parts of the body through the bloodstream or lymphatic system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lung Cancer*</li> <li>• Breast Cancer</li> <li>• Prostate Cancer</li> <li>• Colon Cancer</li> <li>• Lymphoid Cancer</li> <li>• Pancreas</li> </ul>	30,301	1.3 million <sup>5</sup>	Screening tests can begin as early as <b>20-30 years old</b> for certain cancers (e.g., breast cancer with mammograms, cervical cancer with Pap smears). However, some cancers may not be detected until later. <sup>6</sup>	Approximately 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lives. Around <b>1,000</b> people are diagnosed with cancer every week, which averages to about <b>143 new cases</b> each day. <sup>7</sup>
<b>3. Dementia:</b> A decline in cognitive functions, such as memory and thinking, that interferes with daily life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alzheimer's</li> </ul>	16,685	472,000 <sup>8</sup>	Can be detected as early as <b>50-60 years old</b> , especially in individuals with risk factors such as a family history, genetic predispositions (e.g., Alzheimer's disease), or lifestyle factors like smoking and poor cardiovascular health. <sup>9</sup>	Dementia is not a single disease but rather a term used to describe a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, and social abilities. <sup>10</sup>

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<b>4. Respiratory diseases:</b> Affects the respiratory system, including the lungs and airways, leading to impaired breathing and other related symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asthma</li> <li>• Influenza</li> <li>• Pneumonia</li> <li>• Bronchitis</li> <li>• Tuberculosis</li> <li>• COVID-19</li> </ul>	16,246	8.5 million <sup>11</sup>	Chronic respiratory diseases such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) are more commonly diagnosed in older adults, typically <b>40-50 years old</b> and above. <sup>12</sup>	Approximately 1 in 7 Australians over the age of 40 are living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. <sup>13</sup>
<b>5. Diabetes:</b> The body does not produce enough insulin or cannot effectively use the insulin it produces, leading to elevated levels of glucose (sugar) in the blood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type 1 Diabetes</li> <li>• Type 2 Diabetes</li> <li>• Gestational Diabetes</li> </ul>	5,942	1.5 million <sup>14</sup>	Diabetes can be detected at any age, but screening usually begins around <b>30-40 years old</b> for those with risk factors like obesity, family history, or gestational diabetes. <sup>15</sup>	The prevalence of diabetes in Australia is expected to increase due to rising obesity rates and an aging population. <sup>16</sup>
<b>6. Diseases of urinary system:</b> The urinary system includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra, and it plays a crucial role in removing waste and excess fluids from the body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urinary Tract Infections</li> <li>• Kidney Stones</li> <li>• Chronic Kidney Disease</li> </ul>	4,533	1.7 million <sup>17</sup>	Early detection often involves screening for risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and family history. <sup>18</sup>	Drinking plenty of water can help prevent kidney stones by diluting the substances in urine that lead to stones. The kidneys filter about 200 litres of blood every day, removing waste and excess fluids to form urine. <sup>19</sup>
<b>7. Accidents (unintentional injuries):</b> Unexpected events that cause harm or injury.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road Accidents</li> <li>• Falls</li> <li>• Burns</li> <li>• Poisoning</li> <li>• Workplace Accidents</li> </ul>	4,105	1.2 million people affected by accidents each year. <sup>20</sup>	Accidents are unpredictable and can occur at any age. Preventive measures can be implemented from a young age to reduce risk.	Road traffic accidents are a leading cause of injury and death in Australia, with over 1,100 fatalities and 40,000 serious injuries occurring each year.

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<b>8. Intentional self-harm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suicide</li> </ul>	3,214	9 deaths per day. In 2022-2023, females made up two-thirds (66%) of intentional self-harm hospitalisations.	In 2023, approximate number of deaths by suicide by age: <b>Ages 15-24:</b> 450 <b>Ages 25-34:</b> 600 <b>Ages 35-44:</b> 650 <b>Ages 45-54:</b> 700 <b>Ages 55-64:</b> 500 <b>Ages 65 and older:</b> 300 <sup>21</sup>	In 2023, there were 2,419 male suicide deaths and 795 female suicide deaths.  Suicide was the leading cause of death among Australians aged 15-24 years, accounting for almost one-third (31.8%) of all deaths in this age group.
<b>9. Liver disease:</b>  Any condition that affects the liver's function or structure. The liver is a vital organ responsible for many important functions, including detoxifying harmful substances, producing bile for digestion, and storing nutrients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hepatitis</li> <li>• Fatty Liver Disease</li> <li>• Liver Cancer</li> </ul>	2,556	6 million <sup>22</sup>	Can be detected at any age, including in children, through blood tests. Can be congenital or genetic or alcohol or with obesity and metabolic syndrome. <sup>23</sup>	Liver cancer, in particular, has been noted as the fastest increasing cause of cancer death in the country. <sup>24</sup>

\* Includes Malignant neoplasm of trachea, bronchus and lung (also considered respiratory disease) but counted as cancer for this purpose.

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- 6 [Early Detection and Screening](#). Cancer Council
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- 9 [Dementia Facts and Figures](#). Dementia Australia, 6 February 2025
- 10 [Dementia Symptoms and Causes](#). Mayo Clinic
- 11 [Chronic respiratory conditions](#). Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 27 November 2024
- 12 [Respiratory Viruses and Young Children](#). CDC, 26 September 2024
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