



**Translating Research into Policy:  
the role of the National Health and  
Medical Research Council**

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Chair, NHMRC  
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**Life Expectancy at Birth  
Worldwide (2006)**

	Male	Female
Japan	79	86
Monaco	78	85
Andorra	78	85
Switzerland	79	84
Spain	78	84
Australia	79	84
Sweden	79	83
San Marino	80	83
Iceland	79	83
...		
Sierra Leone	39	42
Angola	40	43
Swaziland	41	43

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**Life Expectancy at Birth in Australia**

	Male	Female		
1890	47.2	50.8	} Translation of research into policy	
1900	51.1	54.8		
1910	55.2	58.8		
1920	59.2	63.3		
1930	63.5	67.1		
1950	66.1	70.6		
1960	67.6	74.2		
1970	69.6	76.6		
1980	72.7	79.2		
1990	74.3	80.4		
2000	75.6	81.3		
2006	79	84		
<b>Indigenous Australians</b>	2001	59.4		64.8

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**What is the Role of NHMRC?**

- Extend human knowledge
- Promote high ethical standards
- Provide impartial health advice and guidelines
- Support highest quality research that can make a difference (biomedical, clinical, public health and health services research) to:
  - Improve individual health
  - Improve health care delivery
  - Underpin a dynamic, innovation industry sector



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**Evidence Base for Health  
Policy and Practice**

- Wills (1999) and Grant (2004) Reviews recommended NHMRC improve mechanisms for integration of research-based knowledge into policy and practice.
- New initiatives to influence and support the translation of evidence from research into:
  - *Better individual, public and community health*
  - *Better delivery of health care*
- CEO commissioned an expert panel report (*Policy and Practice Options Committee*) to recommend ways forward for an NHMRC Policy and Practice Program.

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**Prime Minister April 2008  
Address to Heads of  
Agencies & SES**

**Developing evidence-based policy making processes as part of a robust culture of policy contestability:**

- Policy design and policy evaluation should be driven by analysis of all the available options, and not by ideology
- We're interested in facts, not fads.
- In fostering a culture of policy innovation, we should trial new approaches and policy options through small-scale pilot studies.
- Policy innovation and evidence-based policy making is at the heart of being a reformist government.

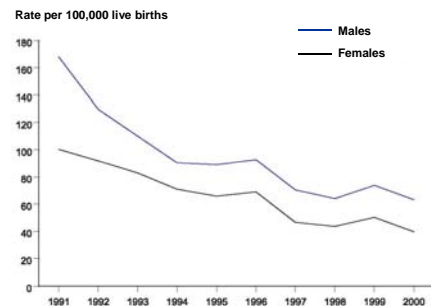
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## Examples of evidence-based policy formulations

- SIDS
- Smoking

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## SIDS rates for infants, 1991-00



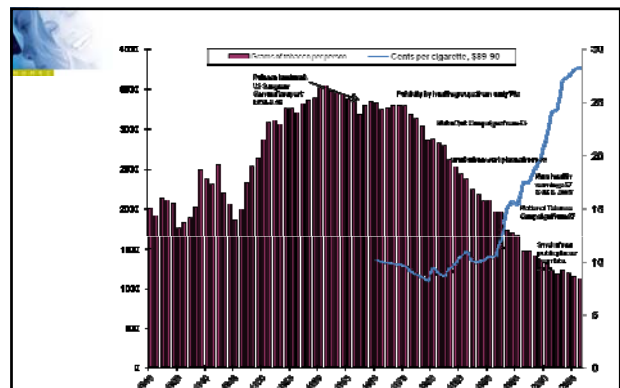
Note: ICD-9 code 708.0 (1991 to 1996) and ICD-10 code R95 (1997 to 2000).  
Source: AIHW Mortality Database [Table A8.1].

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## Fall in SIDS due to

- Change in sleeping position (Terry Dwyer et al)
- Knowledge of risk of maternal smoking

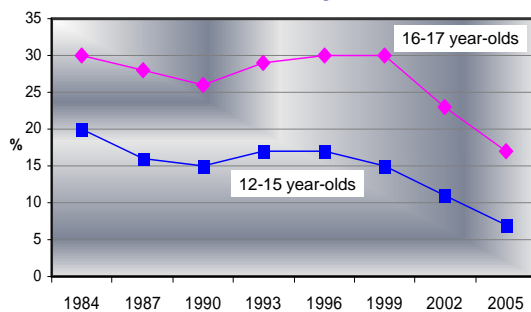
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Source: Scollo, M. VicHealth Centre for Tobacco Control

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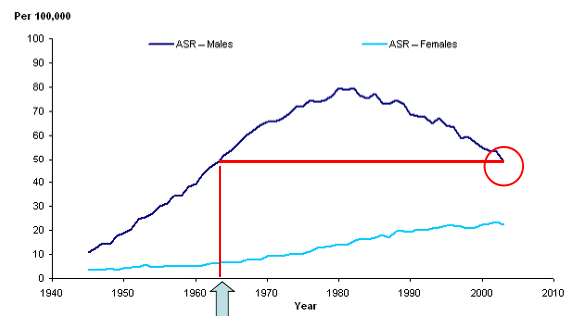
## Past week smoking in 12-15 and 16-17 yrs, Australia



Source: Australian Secondary School Alcohol and Drug Surveys 1984-2005

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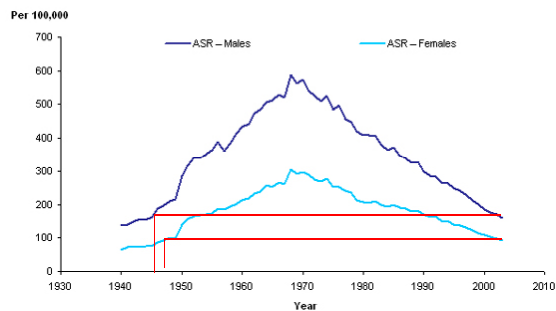
## Male lung cancer rates per 100,000 are today as low as they were in 1963



Source: [http://www.aihw.gov.au/cdarf/data\\_pages/mortality/index.cfm](http://www.aihw.gov.au/cdarf/data_pages/mortality/index.cfm)

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### Trends in death rates for coronary heart disease in Australia, 1940-2003



Source: [http://www.aihw.gov.au/cdarf/data\\_pages/mortality/index.cfm](http://www.aihw.gov.au/cdarf/data_pages/mortality/index.cfm)

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### 8 components of comprehensive tobacco control adopted in Australia

- Tobacco excise tax
- Ban on all forms of tobacco promotion
- Mass reach public awareness campaigns
- Graphic pack warnings
- Clean indoor air policy
- Support for quitting (quitlines)
- Banning misleading descriptors (lights/milds)
- "Denormalisation" of smoking

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### Uptake of research into policy is often delayed

#### Scurvy

1601 lemon juice shown to eliminate scurvy among sailors; 1864 British Board of trade uses citrus for its sailors

#### Asbestos

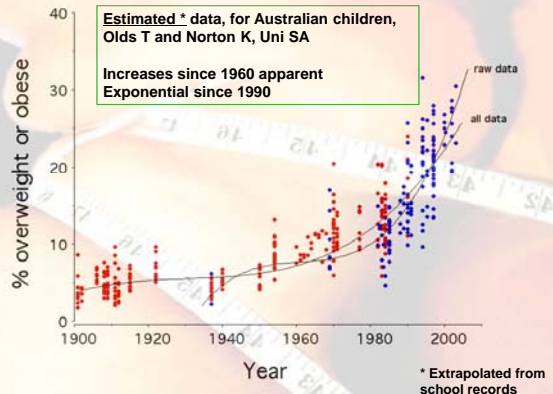
1955 Doll demonstrated relationship between asbestos and lung cancer. 1987 banned in Australia in manufacturing and totally banned in 2003.

#### Childhood obesity

First data about increase in childhood obesity in Australia in 1960s. Policy response?

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### 5-15 yr old Australians



\* Extrapolated from school records

### What increases the use of evidence in policy?

#### Innvaer et al, 2002

(Review of 24 interview studies of health policy makers)

- Personal contact with researchers
- Timely relevance
- Inclusion of summaries & recommendations

#### NSW policy makers

- Better access to researchers
- Better access to research/reviews
- Policy-relevant research

S. Redman  
Sax Institute, Sydney

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### NHMRC Partnerships: Collaboration between policy and practice

- NHMRC Partnerships will:
  - lead to more effective connections between decision makers, policy managers, clinicians and researchers.
  - Provide funding and support to create new opportunities for researchers.
  - Build Australia's capacity to produce high quality applied research to answer complex and difficult questions.

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## NHMRC Partnerships: Collaboration between policy and practice

- NHMRC Partnership Projects
  - Support collaboration between researchers and policy or practice agencies.
- NHMRC Partnership Centres for Research Excellence
  - To be established as leaders in scientific research relevant to policy and practice
  - Established to develop research capacity in areas of interest

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## NHMRC Partnerships: Collaboration between policy and practice

- The schemes will support decision makers by providing evidence from research to assist in developing more effective policies to health improve Australians' health and health care.
- Improve access to high quality research that address short, medium and long term health policy issues.

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## NHMRC Health Guidelines translate research into healthier living for consumers

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## Some Recent Health Guidelines

- *A Systematic Review of the Efficacy and Safety of Fluoridation* (2008)
- *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water* (2008)
- *Air Quality in and around Traffic Tunnels - Systematic Literature Review* (2008)
- *Post-Coma Unresponsiveness and Minimally Responsive State - A guide for families and carers* (2008)
- *Clinical Practice Guidelines for Acute Stroke Management* (2007)



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### Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking

Draft for public consultation  
October 2007

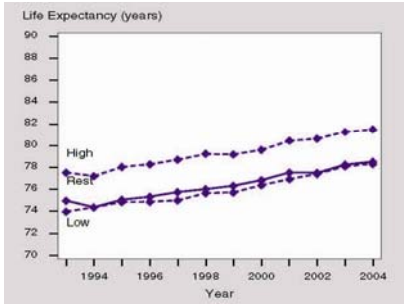
National Health and Medical Research Council

## Some specific challenges requiring translation of research into policy

- Lower socioeconomic status and poor health
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

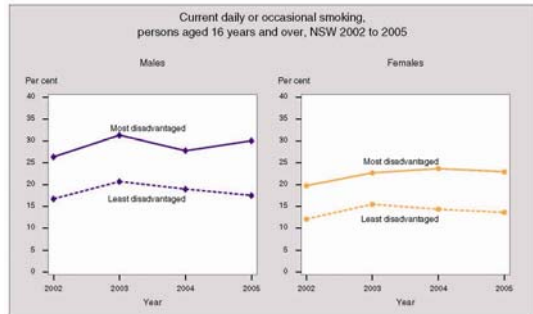
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**Life expectancy at birth in highest and lowest socioeconomic status quintiles and rest of population (males). NSW 1993 to 2004**



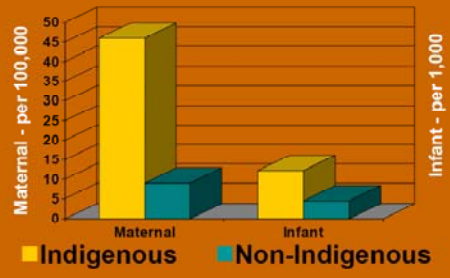
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**Smoking by Socioeconomic Status**



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**Maternal & Infant Mortality**



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**Low birth weight**

World regions	% of infants (less than 2,500g)
<b>Non-Indigenous Australians</b>	<b>6.1</b>
Industrialised countries	7
<b>Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islanders</b>	<b>13</b>
Developing Countries	16
Least developed countries	19
World	15

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**Risks**

- Smoking
- Teen pregnancy
- Lack of antenatal care
- Nutrition & anaemia
- Infection
- Alcohol & drugs



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**Healthy fast food**



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## Healthy fast food

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## Food costs

Grocery Item	Community Store (F.N. QLD)	Supermarket (Brisbane)
Stir Fry Veg	\$7.99	\$1.25
Grapes	\$7.45	\$2.50
Coleslaw	\$4.59	\$1.55
Cucumber	\$5.76	\$4.48
Milk	\$6.62	\$3.19
Cheese	\$5.62	\$4.75
Mince	\$8.00	\$8.00
Baked Beans	\$1.54	\$0.49
Party pies	\$4.75	\$3.95
Pizza	\$3.78	\$3.08
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$56.10</b>	<b>\$33.24</b>

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## Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Up to 54% Indigenous women drank alcohol while pregnant

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- ## Summary
- Australians enjoy near the best health in the world
  - Those less well off have significantly worse health and represent a failure of translation from research into policy
  - NHMRC has a major role to play in improving the health of Australia
  - Guidelines are one important mechanism to disseminate best health practices
  - A partnership between researchers and policy makers undertaking policy and practice-focussed research is the best way to translate research into policy
  - NHMRC is launching a \$30M partnership program to boost policy and practice-focussed research
  - This will hopefully target and benefit those groups who currently suffer the worst health
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