

# Society needs to prepare now for aging

March 31 2011

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A ground-breaking report released today highlights the wide range of health care needs affecting older women.

It warns that individuals, communities and [health care](#) systems need to be prepared for major health and social changes associated with ageing.

The Women, Health and Ageing report, from the internationally-renowned Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH), also highlights the increasing levels of serious [health risks](#), illness and disability among future generations.

The joint University of Newcastle and University of Queensland study has repeatedly surveyed more than 40,000 women since 1996, and the current report focuses on changes in the health of women born between 1921 and 1926.

Significant findings of the study were:

- Most [older women](#) in the study were living with multiple conditions and increasing levels of disability
- Arthritis is a particularly common condition affecting most women in the study, leading to poor quality of life, pain, physical and social limitations and increased health care use
- Women with stroke or cancer have highest use of health care services and had a particularly poor quality of life
- Conditions such as diabetes could be better managed in accordance with current guidelines

- Some surgical interventions may have a profound effect on women's continued well-being.

UQ's Professor Annette Dobson said although extrapolation from one age group to the next was difficult, the situation may be substantially worse when today's young women age, mostly because of the growing problem of obesity and higher uptake of smoking.

Professor Julie Byles, from the University of Newcastle, warned older women should not be treated as one homogenous group.

“While physical abilities have declined for many women in the study, large numbers continued to maintain quite high levels of good health. Likewise, even though women were ageing and had increasing levels of disability and needs for care, many were still providing care for others and making major contributions to their communities.

“Ageing well needs healthy inputs throughout life and requires starting early. The study findings also show clear trends according to women's education levels, body weight, and past and current smoking.”

The study confirms from a long-term perspective, lifetime maintenance of low risk behaviors is the best prospect for reducing the impact of chronic conditions and associated health care costs.

Provided by University of Queensland

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