

Wednesday 4 June 2008

Why do Australian men die early?

It's a well-known fact that the men's life expectancy is lower than women's – but less well understood is that this means men are dying prematurely, often from preventable illnesses, according to researchers at the University of Adelaide.

In the lead-up to International Men's Health Week (9-15 June), the Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health at the University of Adelaide is urging men to consider the facts about their health and do something about it.

Male life expectancy is 78 years – five years lower than that for women (83 years).

"The fact is, men are more likely to die prematurely from a wide range of causes, and male deaths are greater across all age groups," says Professor Willis Marshall, Director of the Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health. "Premature deaths take a great emotional and economic toll on families and society."

The leading causes of premature death among Australian men are heart disease (eg heart attack and angina); suicide; vehicle accidents; and lung cancer. Risk factors such as being overweight or obese, not getting any or sufficient exercise, and depression are all major contributors to men's shorter life expectancy."

"The great problem is that there is a significant burden of undetected disease among men," says Professor Wittert, Head of the School of Medicine at the University of Adelaide and leader of the Florey Adelaide Male Ageing Study (FAMAS). Preliminary results of FAMAS show that of the men aged 35-80 who participated in the study:

- 47% had high cholesterol, but 14% of them were unaware they had it;
- 14% had diabetes, but 4.4% were unaware;
- 60% had hypertension, but 29% were unaware;
- 18.5% had depression, but 6% were unaware.

Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health

Established in partnership with the Freemasons Foundation, the Centre for Men's Health is based at the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine. It is the first of its kind in Australia and one of only a handful of centres in the world with a focus on all aspects of men's health. Over the next five years, it aims to:

- establish a men's health service that provides holistic health services for men;
- develop a comprehensive research program to improve men's health;
- attract high quality researchers from interstate and overseas to build a critical mass of men's health researchers;
- develop continuing education programs for health professionals with an interest in men's health.

"Research is revealing important links between men's health issues – for example there is growing evidence that weight loss is likely to be an effective treatment for erectile dysfunction. There is a burning need to address men's health from a more holistic perspective and that is the main aim of the Freemasons Foundation Centre for Mens Health, says Professor Marshall.

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