



# We will get fatter and ignore health tsunami



**MIKE DAUBE**  
COMMENT

Expect the unexpected in 2020.

We can hope for good news, such as new vaccines and treatments. The bad news may include natural disasters, terrorism and new viruses — the 2011 International One Health conference in Melbourne rightly focuses urgent attention on interactions between animal and human health.

But beyond the unpredictable, some WA 2020 health and lifestyle reports could be written now.

Smoking will be on the way out. Cigarette sales will be strictly regulated. For young people, regular smoking (now 4.8 per cent in WA of 12 to 17-year-olds) will be as marginalised as petrol sniffing. Sixty years after the dangers of smoking were identified, we will be near the end of the massive toll of death and disease caused by this lethal product.

But that's where the good lifestyle news ends.

We are one of the fattest nations on earth, and we will be fatter. About 60 per cent of Australian adults and 25 per cent of our kids are overweight or obese. Those numbers will rise, with further preventable heart disease, cancer and diabetes. The increase in type 2 diabetes will increase health care costs by \$5.6 billion each year by 2032.

Our children's life expectancy will fall because of obesity. There

will be little effective action to reduce the impacts of our affluent, comfortable and car-dominated society and the power of the food industry. This is an entirely predictable health tsunami where all the warnings will be ignored.

Alcohol consumption has been rising for the past two decades. Small wonder we face so much alcohol-caused hospitalisation, road carnage, injury and violence

Young Australians drink at ever-earlier ages when they are especially vulnerable — and they drink to get drunk. All this is fuelled by ready access to cheap liquor, a dysfunctional alcohol taxation system and massive promotional activity.

Children are exposed to constant televised alcohol advertising, occasionally interrupted by sporting activity.

Products are developed with an eye to the youth market. How else can one describe the elegant Passion Pop alcopop promotion — "Now available in a cute, convenient slimline that you can take anywhere"?

We need action in these areas for the wider community and to support disadvantaged groups — including people with mental health problems, who also face substantially worse physical health outcomes — and as a crucial contribution to closing the

indigenous life expectancy gap.

While the new Australian National Preventive Health Agency is a landmark development, our investment in prevention around the country will remain about 2 per cent of the health spend.

So, in 2020 we will be non-smokers, but along with other health and lifestyle problems — and all the health system challenges of a growing, ageing population — WA will be a fat State with ever-younger drinkers.

It will have taken 60 years and a million preventable deaths to get effective action on tobacco. Do we need to wait that long for action on alcohol and obesity?

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**Tubby: Obesity rates are set to swell.**