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People in Canada have good health, are living longer: Global Burden of Disease Study trends

Data from the Global Burden of Disease Study shows that the overall health of Canadians is good and is consistent with other similar countries, and people are living longer with diseases, according to a study in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

“These data show us that Canada is doing well, with a relatively high level of overall health, and with life expectancy and health-adjusted life expectancy that is on par with other similar countries in North America, Europe and Australasia,” says Dr. Heather Orpana, one of the study’s authors and a researcher at the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The study, looking at disease trends from 1990 to 2016, shows that the leading causes of death and disability were noncommunicable diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal diseases, and mental health and substance use disorders, which, in total, made up 56% of all disability-adjusted life years.

“When we look at disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) — a measure that combines both mortality and the impact of having a disease or being in poor health — cancer, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and mental and substance use disorders are the leading cause of DALYs in Canada,” says Dr. Orpana. “These diseases accounted for more than half of all DALYs in Canada in 2016.”

The age-standardized death rate decreased by 12% from 2006 to 2016, although the age-standardized death rate from mental and substance use disorders increased by 11%. The authors suggest that this trend may persist as the opioid epidemic continues in Canada.

Disease trends reflect an aging population, in which, as of 2015, people over the age of 65 years outnumber younger Canadians for the first time in history.

According to Dr. Justin Lang, lead author of the study, “As our population ages, we are seeing the burden of health loss shift from mortality to disability. Studies like this help us understand which diseases and conditions are the largest contributors to health loss across the country. As the population continues to age, it will be important to monitor

not only mortality and the prevalence of diseases and injuries, but also the impact these diseases and injuries have on the health experience of Canadians.”

Careful planning of health care delivery and public health will be important as the population continues to age to support Canadians living longer with multiple diseases.

“*Global Burden of Disease Study trends for Canada from 1990 to 2016*” is published November 5, 2018.

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