

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The best measure of health care

Professor Louisa Jorm, from the Centre for Health Research in the School of Medicine, is leading a team investigating the best way to measure quality and affordability of primary health care in Australia. The complex collaboration, examining potentially preventable hospitalisations (PPH) and involving international research units and three partner agencies, is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

'Rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations are regarded as an indicator of the quality and affordability of primary and community care and are increasingly being used to track the progress of health reform,' says Professor Jorm. 'Yet PPH indicators are almost untested outside the United States. This project will validate PPH as a measure of health system performance in Australia.'

Australia's National Healthcare Agreement stipulates a wide range of conditions for which hospitalisation is potentially preventable through timely and effective provision of primary care. These include chronic conditions such as asthma, complications from diabetes, and high blood pressure; acute conditions such as ear, nose and throat infections, dental conditions and cellulitis; and vaccine-preventable conditions such as influenza and pneumonia. The study will examine links between the frequency, nature and costs of primary care services, with inpatient diagnosis of potentially preventable hospitalisations, as well as long-term health outcomes for people with chronic diseases.

This project will use the 45 and Up Study, for which more than 265,000 people aged 45 and older, randomly sampled from the Medicare Australia database, completed a questionnaire and agreed to long-term follow-up. Further data will be drawn from GP consultations and pharmaceutical claims, as well as hospital and emergency department admissions, to give a detailed picture of participants'



overall health, socioeconomic status, the availability of health care services in the area that they live in, and their use of these services.

This research aims to improve the way in which preventable hospital admissions are measured and reported, which can help reduce associated costs to the economy and society, as well as improve health service delivery. The researchers' three partner agencies – the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, the Agency for Clinical Innovation, and the NSW Bureau of Health Information – have key roles in specifying or measuring health system quality and performance. Through their participation, the findings will be directly and rapidly incorporated into policy and practice in NSW and Australia.

Project Title: Are "potentially preventable hospitalisations" a valid measure of the quality and affordability of primary and community care in Australia?

Funding has been set at: \$387,140

Additional funding from partners: \$160,000

Other Chief Investigators: Prof Alastair Leyland, Dr Fiona Blyth, Prof Robert Elliott, A/Prof Kirsty Douglas, Prof Sally Redman

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