

Research Australia

An alliance for discoveries in health



# Health & Medical Research Public Opinion Poll 2009

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## Research Australia Philanthropy



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# Acknowledgements

## Crosby|Textor

Research Australia thanks Crosby|Textor for conducting this public opinion poll and for supporting our activities.

Crosby|Textor is a boutique polling and communications consultancy that delivers actionable, quality-driven market research to corporations, industry associations and government. The combined experience of its staff in researching the opinions, hopes, concerns, motivations and values of people in over 35 countries, provides Crosby|Textor with unique and extensive insight into public opinion around the world.

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# Foreword

This year's poll showed that Australians appear to be absorbed with 'battering down the hatches' and hopefully getting through the global financial crisis relatively unscathed. Despite this, on a considered basis, health is put ahead of economic priorities. Prompted with what priorities government should be focusing on over the next 2–3 years, Australians rate 'improving hospitals and the health system' the highest priority for the fifth year running.

51% of Australians have been negatively affected by the global financial crisis, with the most commonly reported health effect being stress caused by increasing unemployment (including more partial employment) and financial insecurity, including the impact upon retirement incomes and plans. More than a quarter of Australians have avoided or delayed visiting the doctor in the last six months, with people aged 35–49, living in South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory most affected. This suggests an important link between the economy and health, and the community response to increased financial pressure.

Despite pressured household budgets and concerns about employment, there is still strong support for medical research. Most Australians agree that the rate of NHMRC funding should continue to substantially increase beyond 2010.

'Medical and health research on prevention, treatment and cures for illnesses and diseases' achieves the highest rated agreement as a sector that will play an important role in Australia's future, mentioned by 90% of those surveyed. The poll found that 64% support a tax on junk foods to help reduce excessive consumption and to avoid the damaging health effects and costs. In a strong show of support for improving men's health, 84% agreed that the introduction of a comprehensive annual men's health check-up, fully covered by Medicare, would encourage Australian men to seek regular advice about the early warning signs of ill health. For young people, Australians consider the most important health issues requiring action are related to smoking, alcohol and drugs.

The poll identified strong community support for regular public reporting of quality, safety and performance indicators by hospitals. However, qualitative research revealed concerns that the health system, which is largely perceived to be struggling, may further suffer if hospital reporting concentrated professional, public and media criticism on the lower performers.

Despite repeated serious disease outbreaks in recent times, including the swine flu, bird flu and Dengue fever, Australians are not overly concerned about catching serious infectious diseases themselves. Just 8% say they are extremely concerned, with 13% being very concerned. This suggests that the majority of Australians are not very likely to take actions against a serious infectious disease outbreak.

The survey findings are particularly relevant in the broad context of government reviews and reports on health system reform, primary health care, innovation and preventive health.



**Dr Chris Roberts**  
Chairman



**Rebecca James**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Methodology

Research Australia commissioned Crosby|Textor to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on the attitudes and perceptions of the community toward health and medical research. Qualitative research was conducted through focus groups and quantitative research conducted through an online survey.

## Focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted in Brisbane in May 2009: one group amongst retirees and semi-retirees aged 55 and older (including a 50/50 mix of pensioners and self-funded retirees) and one group of 25–54 year olds where men were employed full-time and women were either employed full-time or on home duties with dependent children aged under 18 living in their care. No 25–54 year-olds relied on government benefits for the majority of their income.

## Insights from focus groups

Asked why governments should spend more money on health and medical research than health itself (e.g. hospitals, doctors and nurses), Australians see the 'return on investment' as greater:

*"It is an area where if you spend money you will make money."*

*"The system at the moment is wrong and near collapse and so it will save money in the future if we change now."*

*"An extra 2% will make a bigger difference in health and medical research than in health."*

The economic benefit to Australia of health and medical research is well recognised, especially as traditional industries wane and people see the need for replacement business and government revenues.

*"We can't compete with the labour resources of China. They have people laid on. We don't have the manpower so we have to have the brain power to get over that."*



# Demographic profile

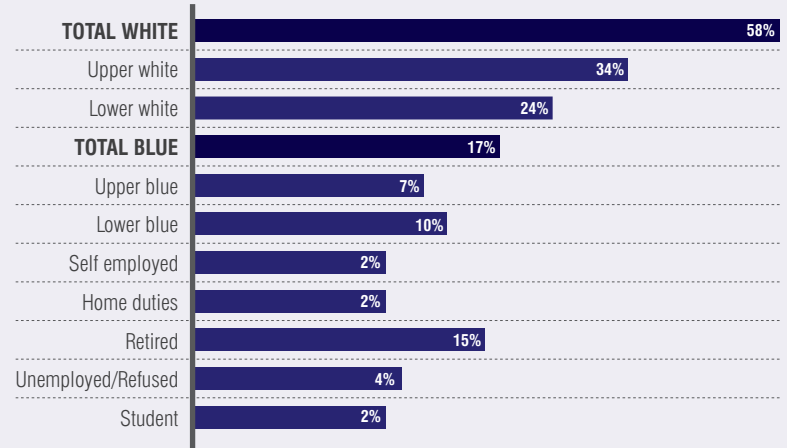
## Quantitative

Quantitative research consisted of an online survey, with an effective national sample of n=806 people over 18 years of age, conducted between 2–7 July 2009. The maximum margin of error for a sample size of approximately n=800 is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

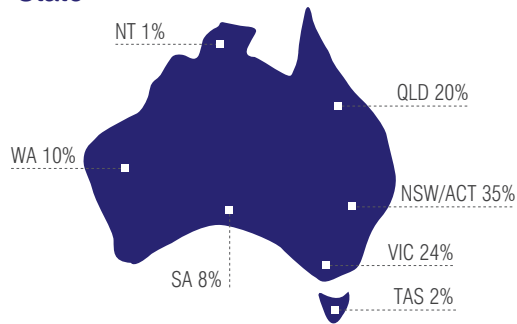
## Employment

59% of participants were in paid employment and 41% were not in paid employment

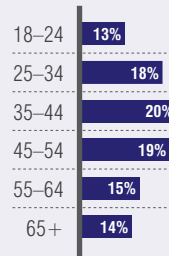
## Work and Household Status



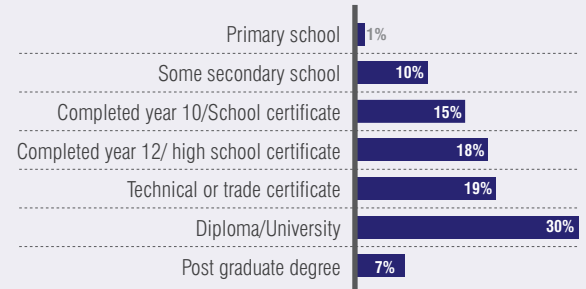
## State



## Age



## Highest level of education



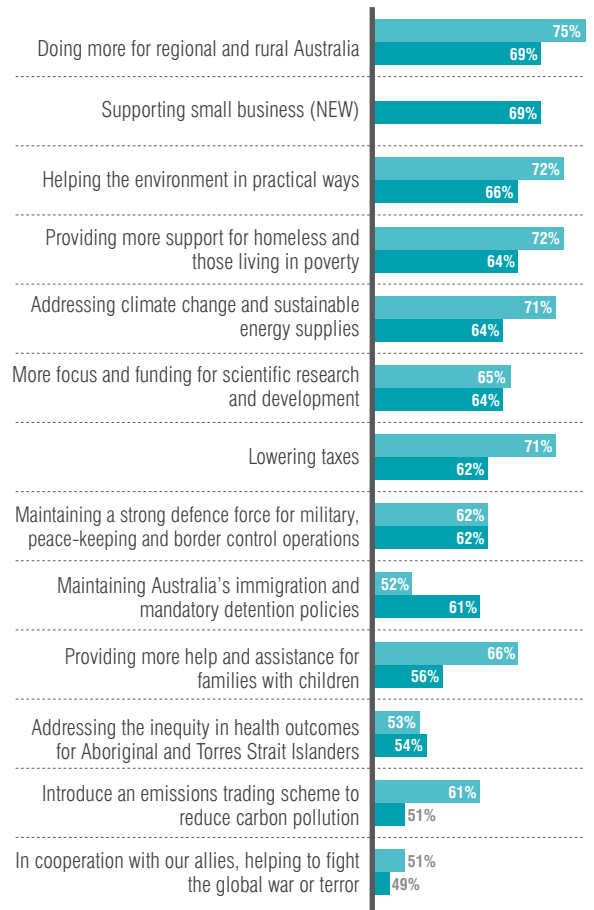
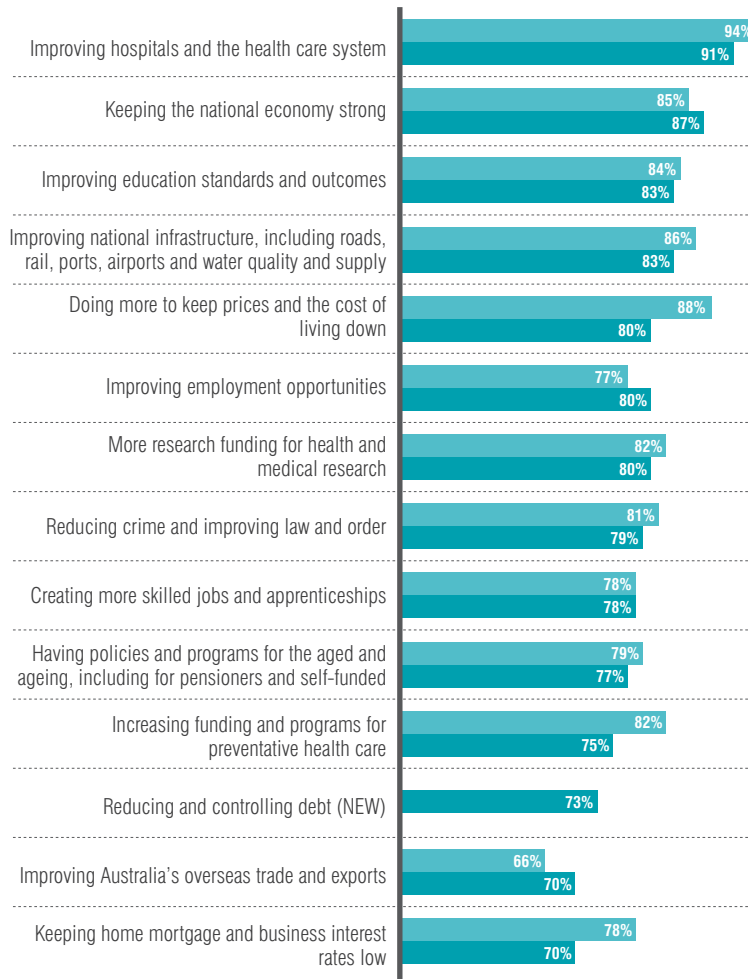
## Hospitals and health system remain the highest priority

**Q:** Firstly, please think about what priorities you think the Federal Government should be focusing on over the next 2–3 years. As you read through the following list of issues, please rate how important you personally think each issue is, as an important priority for the Federal Government to be focusing on over the next 2–3 years. Please use a 0 to 10 scale where a 0 means that it is not so important a priority up to a 10 means that it is an extremely important or critical priority for the Federal Government to be focusing on over the next 2–3 years.

- 80% of Australians think more funding for health and medical research is an important priority for the Federal Government over the next 2–3 years.







## Medical and health research most important industry for Australia's future.

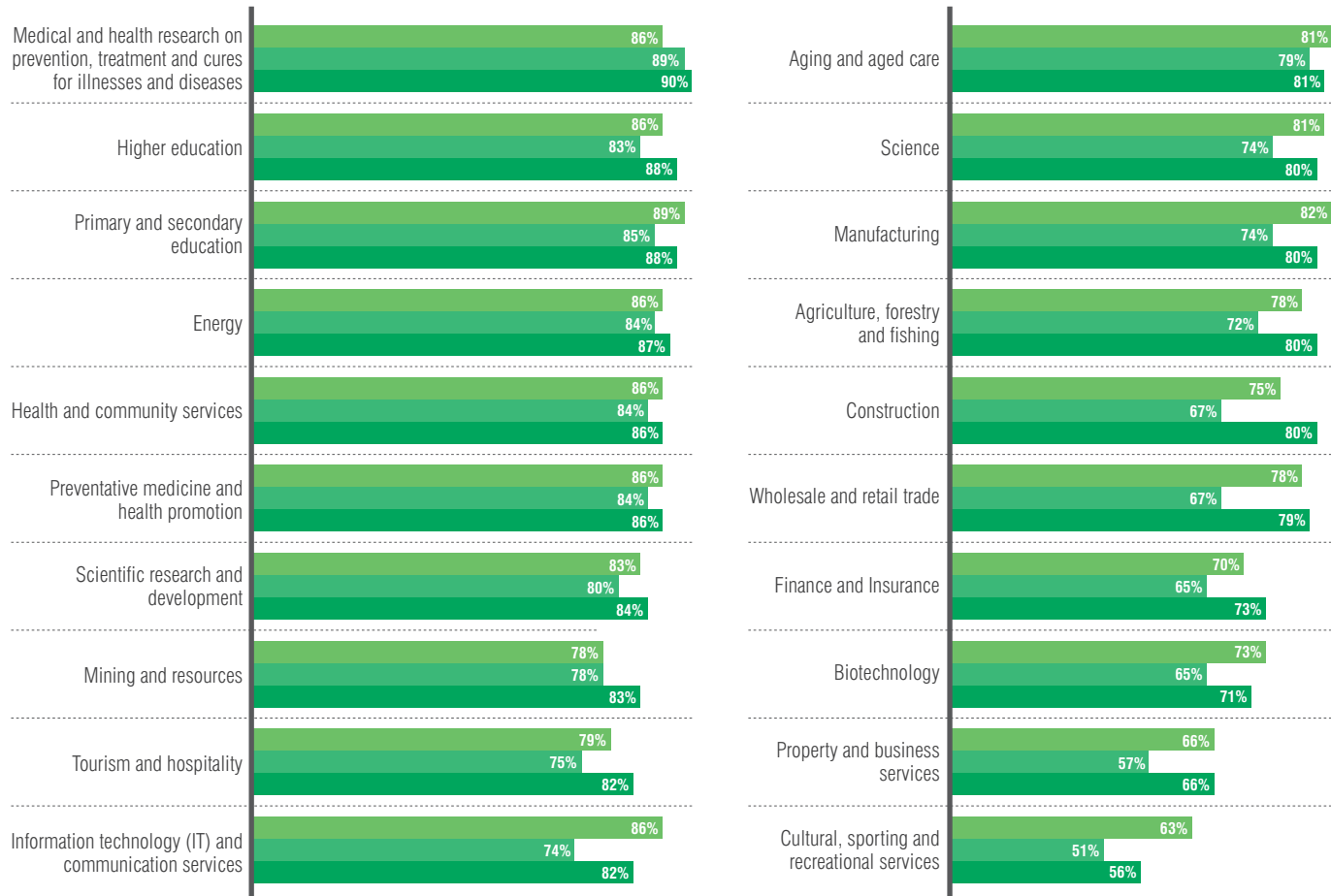
**Q:** Following are a list of industries and sectors that may or may not play an important role in Australia's future. For each industry or sector please rate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that it **WILL** play an important role in Australia's future.

- 90% of Australians believe medical and health research on prevention, treatment and cures for illnesses and diseases will play an important role in Australia's future.
- There is increasing support for economic and production sectors, including manufacturing and construction

2005  

2008 

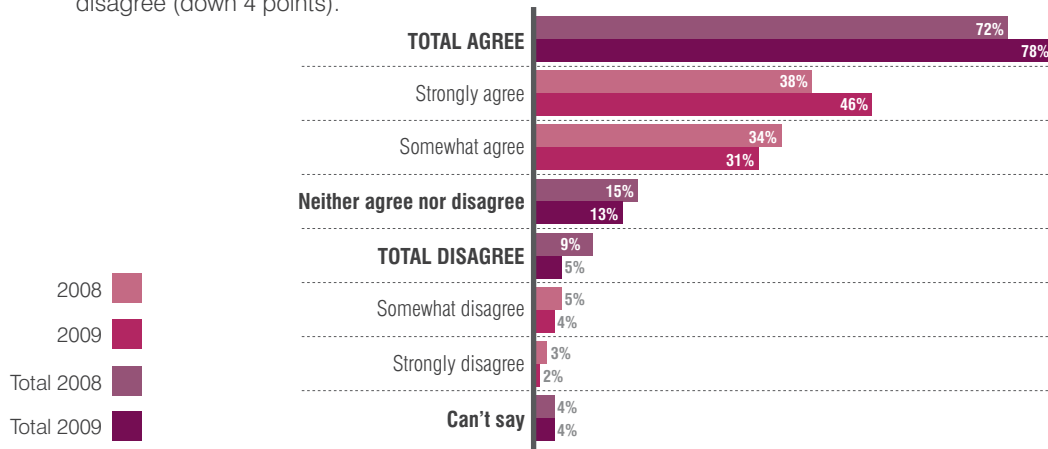
2009 



## Australians increasingly support more NHMRC funding beyond 2010

**Q:** Federal Government budget allocations for the National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia's peak government funding agency for health and medical research) increased five-fold from 1995 to 2010. But beyond 2009–2010, only minor funding increases are planned. Do you agree or disagree (and is that somewhat or strongly agree or disagree) that the rate of NHMRC funding should continue to substantially increase beyond 2010?

- In line with the continuing high priority placed on health as a current issue and an important industry sector for the future, 78% of Australians (up 6 points since 2008) agree that the rate of NHMRC funding should continue to substantially increase beyond 2010. Only 5% overall disagree (down 4 points).



# Australia can be a world leader in health and medical research.

**Q:** It has been suggested that if Australian Governments continued to invest heavily into health and medical research then Australia could in fact become a world leader in this field. Please rate how whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following reasons for why Australian Governments should continue to invest heavily into health and medical research with the aim of Australia becoming a world leader in this field.

- 85% agree that by aiming to be the world's best we can attract the best and brightest people to Australia
- 80% agree that we should not aim for anything except the best
- 85% agree that by developing Australia as a leader, it will have a multiplier effect, bringing about economic benefits.

Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree

By aiming to be worlds best in health and medical research we could attract the best and brightest people from other countries to Australia, rather than losing our best people and ideas overseas



Rewards will come from striving to be the best in the world. Australia's international sporting, military and theatrical achievements prove that despite our relatively small population, we should confidently set our goals high. We should not aim for anything except the best because when we set our hearts, minds and resources to being the best we are likely to succeed.



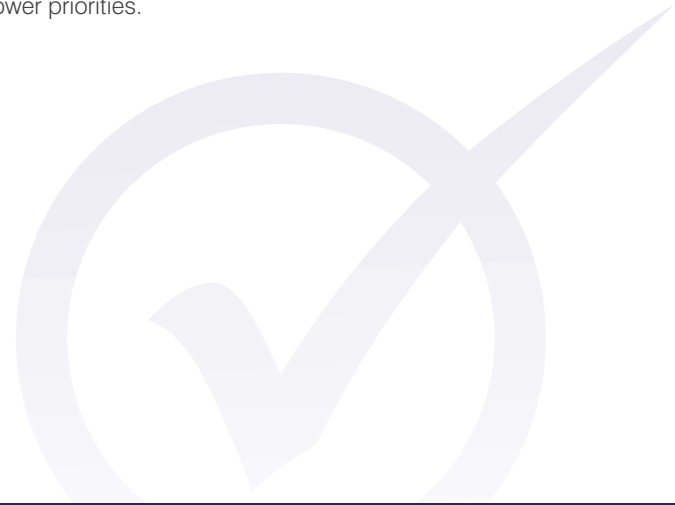
Developing Australia as a leader and a centre of excellence for health and medical research would have a multiplier effect and bring about new and added economic and employment benefits.

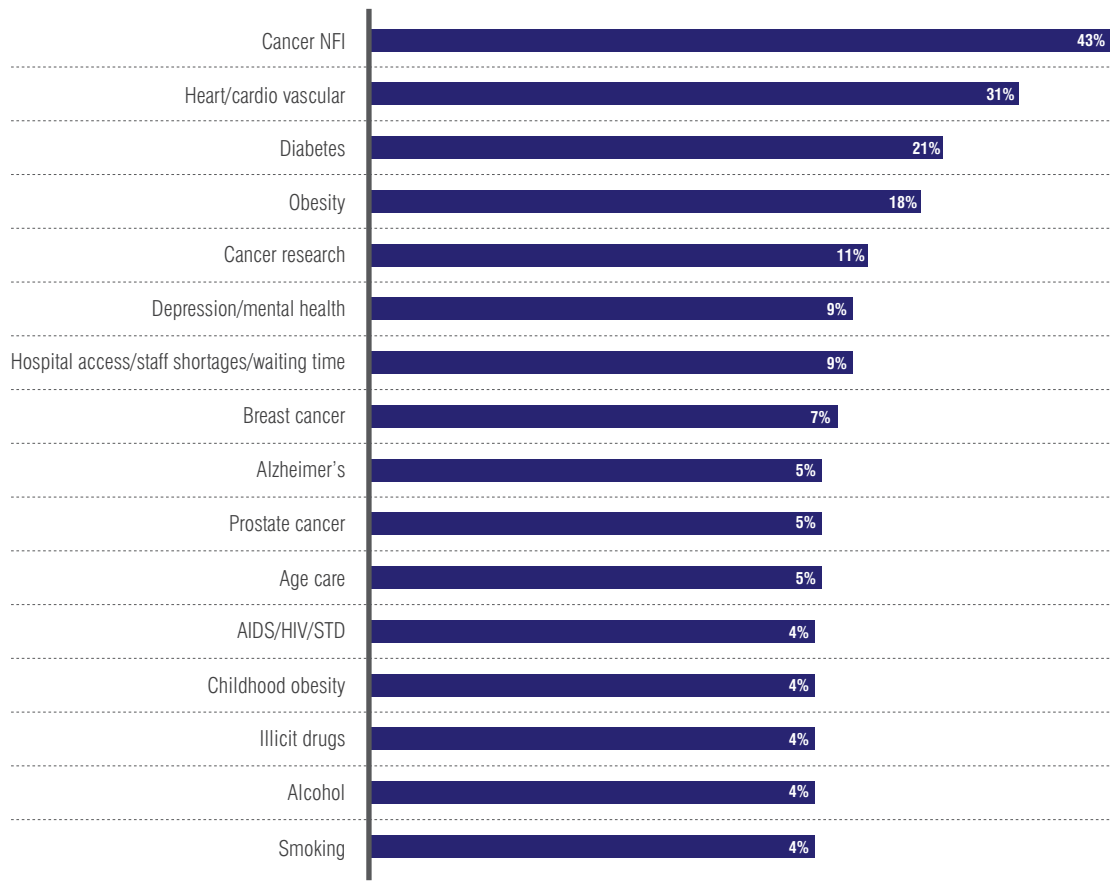


## Alcohol and smoking considered least important preventive health research areas.

**Q:** In your opinion, what, specifically, are the three most important health and medical problems, issues or diseases to you, your family or to Australia as a whole that should receive a significant increase in funding for research into their prevention and cure? Please be as specific as you can, using a minimum of 3–5 words to describe the issue or disease.

The most important areas of research for prevention or cures are cancer, heart related conditions, diabetes and obesity. Smoking, alcohol, illicit drugs, HIV/AIDS and childhood obesity, are identified as lower priorities.

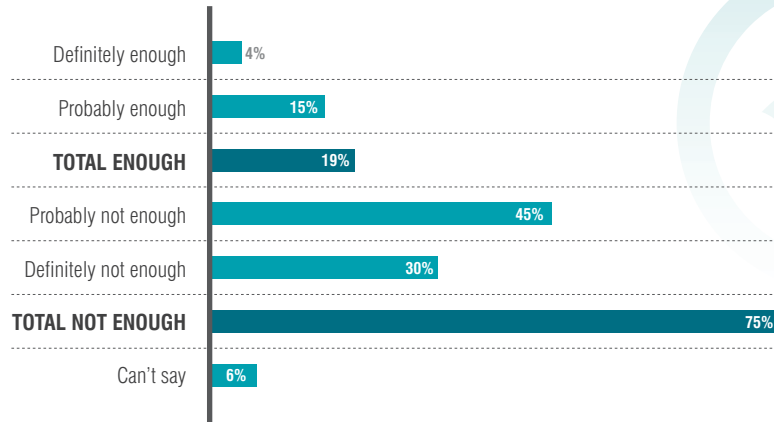




# Youth need more education and information about mental health

**Q:** Thinking specifically about youth mental health issues, which include issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, suicide, self harm, self esteem and self confidence. Do you think there is enough education and information available to youth on the issue of mental health?

- Three quarters of Australians think there is not enough information available to youth about mental health. Only 4% think there is definitely enough.

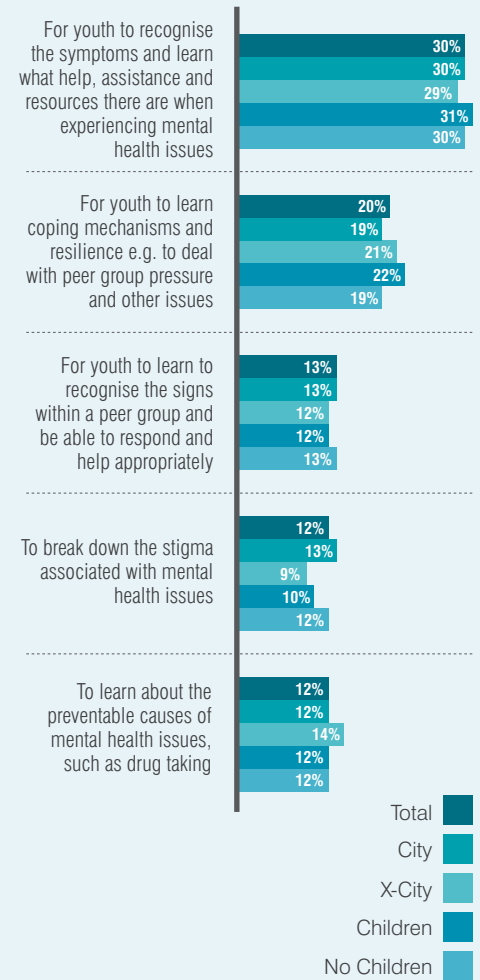




# Youth need help to recognise the symptoms and how to get help with mental health issues

**Q:** Which ONE of the following reasons do you think is the MOST important reason schools should teach today's youth about mental health issues?

- 30% of Australians believe it is important to teach youth about mental health issues so that they recognise the symptoms and can get help.
- Families without children are equally concerned about youth mental health issues.
- Handling peer group pressure is recognised as a significant youth issue.






# Economic uncertainty puts healthcare on hold for some

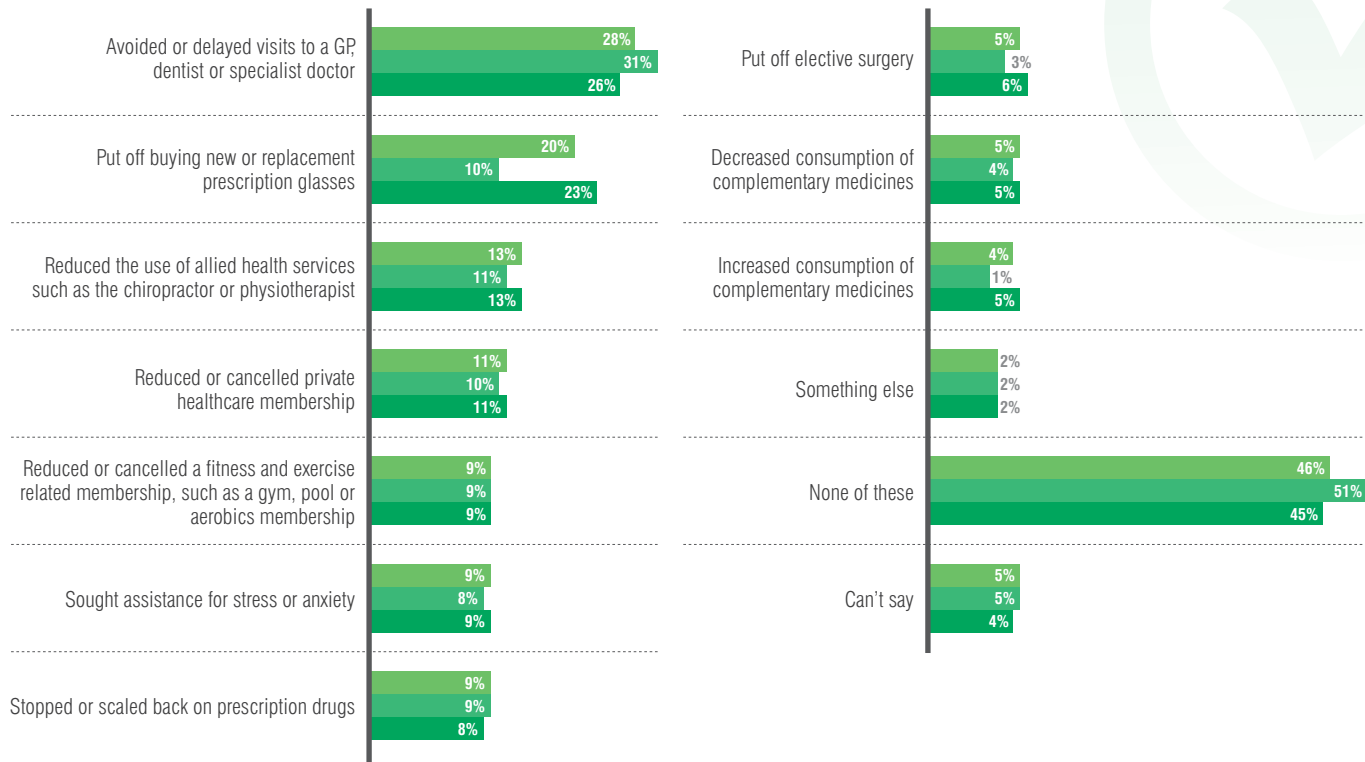
**Q:** There have been reports of people taking various health related actions as a result of the global financial crisis and increasing financial pressures and concerns over the last 6 months. In the last 6 months, have you or your household attempted to save money by taking any of the following health related actions as a result of the global financial crisis and increasing financial pressures and concerns?

To counter tightening household budgets:

- 28% have 'Avoided or delayed visits to a GP, dentist or specialist doctor'
- 20% have 'Put off buying new or replacement prescription glasses'
- 13% have 'Reduced the use of allied health services' and
- 11% have 'Reduced or cancelled private healthcare membership.'

Almost half have taken no action, including 52% of those with private health insurance.

Total   
Have children   
No Children 

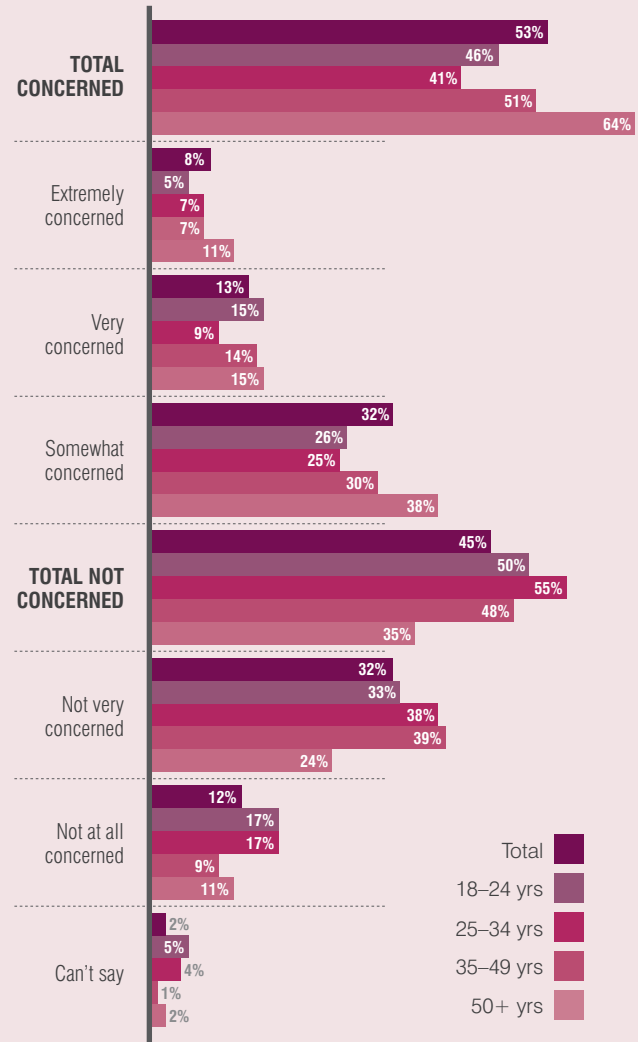




## Little concern about risk of infectious diseases such as swine flu

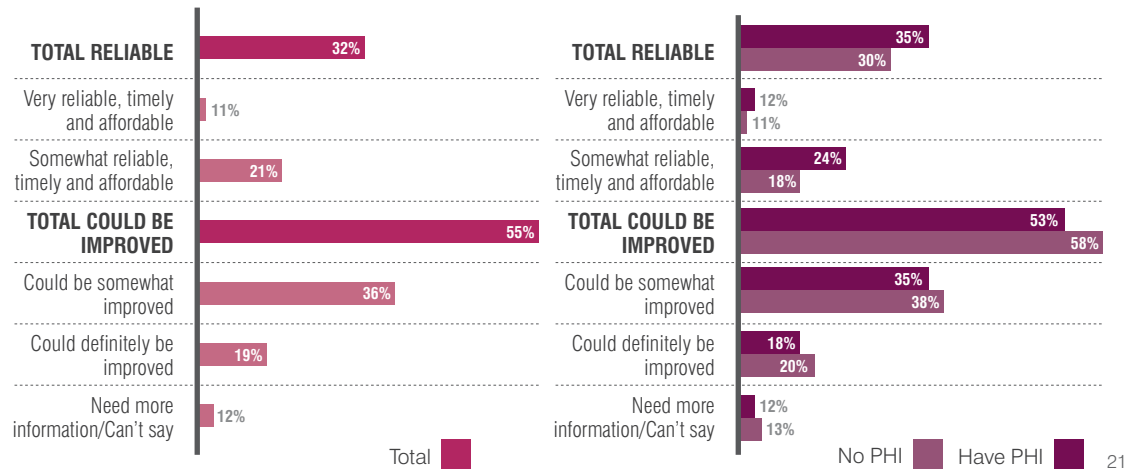
**Q:** How concerned are you about you or someone in your household contracting an infectious disease such as the swine flu, the bird flu or Dengue fever?

- Only 8% of Australians are extremely concerned, and 13% very concerned about catching an infectious disease such as swine flu
- Women are more likely to be concerned, and people over the age of 50 are the age group most likely to be 'somewhat concerned.'



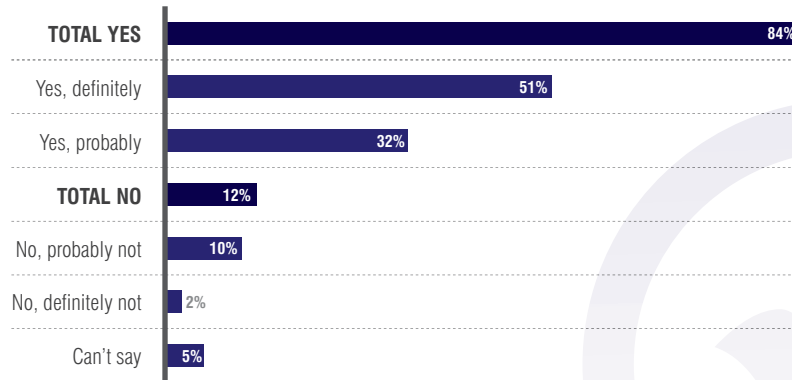
# Access to medicines through the PBS could be improved.

**Q:** Australia has a subsidized prescription medicine scheme called the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The intention of the PBS is to allow reliable, timely access to essential medicines at a cost individuals can afford. Some argue that the time required for approval and PBS listing, especially for medicines requiring government approval, can sometimes be too lengthy and worsen health outcomes for those waiting. Others argue that the time taken is necessary to properly consider the medical and financial merit of all the new applications competing for PBS funding. Do you think Australians have reliable, timely and affordable access to needed medicines through the PBS or could the system be expanded or improved?



# Taxpayer funded health checks for men get thumbs up




**Q:** Today the average Australian life expectancy at birth is up to five years less for men than it is for women. Some Australian men have been shown to ignore or delay seeking advice about early warning signs of ill health and as a solution the introduction of a comprehensive annual men's health check-up fully covered by Medicare has been suggested. Do you think the introduction of a comprehensive annual men's health check-up fully covered by Medicare is a good solution to encourage Australian men to seek regular advice about the early warning signs of ill health?

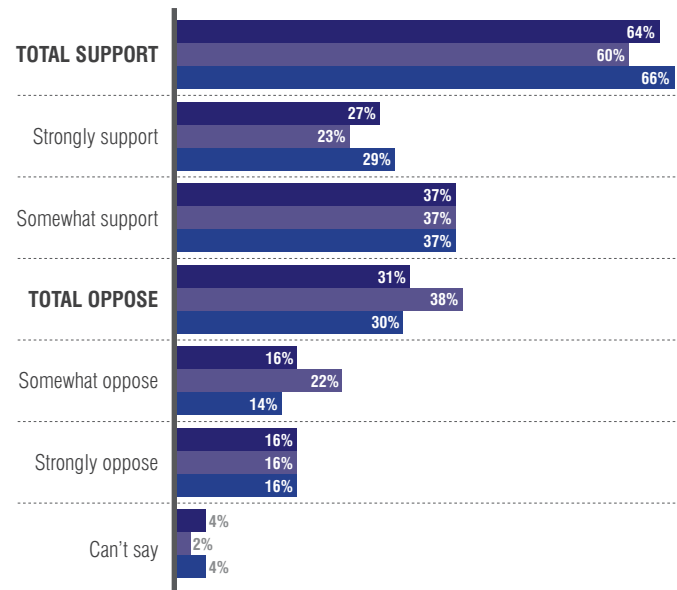


# Two-thirds of Australians support a health tax on junk foods

**Q:** Partly to reduce consumption and the damaging health effects and costs, the Australian Government currently imposes high taxes on products such as alcohol and cigarettes. Do you support or oppose a tax on junk foods to help reduce excessive consumption and to avoid the damaging health effects and costs of too much junk food?



Total   
Have children   
No Children 



# Research Australia member list

## Businesses/Companies

Biogen Idec Australia Pty Ltd  
Biota Holdings Limited  
Brooker Consulting  
Cochlear Limited  
CSL Limited  
Diabetes Vaccine Development Centre  
Eli Lilly Australia Pty Ltd  
GlaxoSmithKline Australia Pty Ltd  
Global Philanthropic  
Integrated Sciences Pty Limited  
Inverness Medical Innovations Australia  
Macquarie Group Foundation  
MBF Foundation  
NAB Health  
Pacific Strategy Partners  
Pfizer Pty Ltd  
Q-Pharm Pty Ltd  
ResMed Foundation Limited  
Rioche Products Pty. Ltd.  
Sanofi-aventis  
Sisters of Charity Health Service  
– St. Vincents Hospital Melbourne  
Tyrian Diagnostics Limited  
Virginia Rigoni Consulting Pty Ltd  
Industry Groups  
AusBiotech Ltd

Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce  
Australian Association of Neurologists  
Australian Society for Medical Research  
Bioplatforms Australia Limited  
Medical Technology Association of Australia Ltd.  
Medicines Australia  
Queensland Clinical Trials Network Inc.  
Research Canada  
Research!America  
Sydney Chamber of Commerce

## Biotechnology Consortia/Hubs

ATP Innovations  
Bio21 Cluster  
BioMelbourne Network  
The HEARing CRC & HearWorks Pty Ltd

## Special Interest Groups

Arthritis Foundation of Australia  
Asthma Foundations of Australia  
Asthma Foundation of NSW  
Audiology Australia  
Australian Cancer Research Foundation  
Australian Dental Research Foundation  
Australian Red Cross Blood Service  
Australian Rotary Health  
Australian Stem Cell Centre



## Research Australia member list *(cont)*

Beyondblue Ltd  
Cerebral Palsy Foundation  
Children, Youth & Women's Health Service  
Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust Ltd  
Cure Cancer Australia Foundation  
Cystic Fibrosis Australia  
Diabetes Australia  
Gallipoli Research Foundation Ltd  
Garnett Passe and Rodney Williams  
Memorial Foundation  
Heart Foundation  
Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation  
Leukaemia Foundation of Australia  
Mental Health Council of Australia  
Mercy Health Foundation  
MS Research Australia  
National Breast & Ovarian Cancer Centre  
National Breast Cancer Foundation  
National Stroke Foundation  
Parks Forum  
Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research  
Research and Education Foundation, RACP  
Smile Foundation  
Sports Medicine Australia  
The Menzies Foundation

### Medical Research Institutes

ANZAC Research Institute  
Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Research Institute  
– Nucleus Network  
Bionic Ear Institute  
Brain & Mind Research Institute  
– Sydney University  
Burnet Institute  
Centenary Institute  
Children's Cancer Institute Australia for  
Medical Research  
Children's Medical Research Institute  
Florey Neurosciences Institute  
– Brain Research Institute Pty. Ltd.  
– National Ageing and Research Institute  
– National Stroke Research Institute  
– Neurosciences Victoria  
Garvan Institute of Medical Research  
George Institute for International Health  
Hanson Institute  
Heart Research Institute  
Hunter Medical Research Institute  
Illawarra Health & Medial Research Institute  
Joanna Briggs Institute  
Kids Research Institute at the Children's Hospital  
at Westmead  
Kolling Institute of Medical Research  
Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research



# Research Australia member list *(cont)*

## Medical Research Institutes *(cont)*

Lung Institute of Western Australia Inc.  
Mater Medical Research Institute  
Mental Health Research Institute  
Menzies Research Institute  
Menzies School of Health Research  
Monash Institute of Medical Research  
Murdoch Children's Research Institute  
Orygen Research Centre  
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre  
Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research  
Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute  
Queensland Institute of Medical Research  
Sax Institute  
Schizophrenia Research Institute  
St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research  
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research  
Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute  
Walter & Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research  
Western Australian Institute for Medical Research  
Westmead Millennium Institute  
Women's and Children's Health Research Institute  
Woolcock Institute

## Professional Associations

Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS)  
Royal Australasian College of  
Medical Administrators

## Government Agencies

Cancer Australia  
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional  
Development, Victoria  
NSW Office for Science & Medical Research  
Victorian Neurotrauma Initiative Pty Ltd

## Universities/Academic Institutions

Australian Catholic University  
– Australian National University  
– Australian Centre for Economic Research  
on Health  
– Australian National University Medical School  
– Australian Primary Health Care Institute  
– Centre for Mental Health Research  
– John Curtin School of Medical Research  
– Menzies Centre for Health Policy  
– National Centre for Epidemiology and  
Population Health  
– Research School of Biological Sciences  
– School of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology  
Charles Sturt University  
– Faculty of Science  
– Centre for Inland Health  
Curtin University of Technology  
Deakin University  
Edith Cowan University  
Griffith University



# Research Australia member list (cont)

James Cook University

Macquarie University

Monash University

Queensland University of Technology

- Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation

RMIT University

University of Adelaide

University of Melbourne

University of Queensland

- Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology

- Institute for Molecular Bioscience

- Queensland Brain Institute

- UQ Diamantina Institute for Cancer, Immunology and Metabolic Medicine

- Faculty of Health Sciences

- Faculty of Biological and Chemical Sciences

- School of Pharmacology

University of South Australia

University of Sydney

- Australian Health Policy Institute (AHPI)

- Bosch Institute

- The Medical Foundation

- NHMRC Clinical Trials Centre

- Sydney Cancer Institute

- Sydney Bioinformatics

- School of Molecular and Microbial Biosciences

- School of Psychology

- School of Biological Sciences

- Save Sight Institute

University of Tasmania

University of Technology Sydney

University of Western Australia

University of Western Sydney

University of Wollongong

## Research Australia Philanthropy

Department of Health and Ageing

GlaxoSmithKline Australia Pty Ltd

## Honorary Life Members

John Funder, AO

John Niland, AC

Peter Wills, AC

The Hon Michael Wooldridge

Honorary Members

DLA Phillips Fox Lawyers

KPMG



## Research Australia Limited

### Sydney

384 Victoria Street  
Darlinghurst NSW 2010

**T** +61 2 9295 8536 **F** + 61 2 9295 8161

### Melbourne

Suite 2, Mezzanine  
257 Collins Street Melbourne Vic 3000

**T** + 61 3 9662 9366 **F** + 61 3 9639 4126

**E** [enquiries@researchaustralia.org](mailto:enquiries@researchaustralia.org)

**ABN** 28 095 324 379

[www.researchaustralia.org](http://www.researchaustralia.org)

# Research Australia

An alliance for discoveries in health