

A health behaviour overview

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RECOMMENDED FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION - ARE WE EATING 2 & 5?

Healthy eating practices can prevent and assist in managing a variety of diseases, including: type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, musculoskeletal problems, cancers, and renal disease. The nationwide Government health initiative, 'Go for 2&5' recommends the daily intake of 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables each day for Australians aged 16 years and over (The go for 2&5 Campaign 2005, Eat Well Australia 2000-2010 2001, The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating 1998).

Population Health Surveillance data that investigates the prevalence of recommended fruit and vegetable consumption is available through the NSW Health Population Health Survey, an annual telephone survey of around 12,000 NSW residents, including around 1,500 from the HNE region. In this survey, fruit and vegetable consumption is assessed using the item "How many serves of fruit and vegetable do you usually eat each day", with one serve of fruit being defined as "1 medium piece or 2 small pieces" and one serve of vegetable defined as "a 1/2 cup of cooked vegetables or 1 cup of salad vegetables".

This Health Behaviour Overview (HBO) presents information from the Survey for the Hunter New England (HNE) health region and NSW, between 1997 and 2008, with the aim of examining the relationship between fruit and vegetable

consumption and demographic factors, including gender and age.

RECOMMENDED FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION

General trends

Consistent with NSW trends, between 1997-2008 there was a significant increase in the proportion of HNE health region residents who consumed the recommended serves of fruits (1997 41.7% CI 39.3-44.2 to 2008 56.6% CI 52.8-60.4) [graph 1]. Whilst the proportion of HNE health region residents who consume the recommended serves of vegetables (1997 11.2% CI 9.6-12.8 to 2008 12.5% CI 10.2-14.8) [graph 2] remained steady. When compared to NSW residents (10.2% CI 9.4-11.0), in 2008, HNE health region (12.5% CI 10.2-14.8) residents were slightly more likely to consume the recommended serves of vegetables [graph 2].

Gender breakdown

In 2008, HNE health region females were statistically more likely to consume the recommended serves of fruit (63.4% CI 58.7-68.1) and vegetables (17.3% CI 13.8-20.8) when compared to their male counterparts (Fruit 49.8% CI 43.9-55.7 and Vegetable 7.6% CI 4.8-10.4). Whilst the proportion of females who consume the recommended serves of vegetables has increased since 1997, in contrast to trends in NSW, the recommended consumption of vegetables by males across the HNE health region has reduced over time (1997 10.8% CI 8.4-13.2 to 2008 7.6% CI 4.8-10.4) [graph 2].

Age breakdown

In 2008, HNE health region residents aged 16-24 (54%; CI 41.8-66.3) years and over 45 years (59.4%; CI 50.8-68.0 to 70.8%; CI 63.8-77.9) reported the highest rates of recommended fruit consumption. However, of particular concern are the low reported rates of recommended fruit consumption in HNE health region residents aged 25-44 years (25-34 years, 46.6%; CI 34.7-58.4 and 35-44 years, 45.4%; CI 35.5-55.3). This trend is similar to those trends observed across NSW for residents aged 35-44 years (49.3%; CI 45.7-53.0) [graph 3].

Recommended vegetable consumption was highest in persons aged 35 years and over across the HNE health region (35-44 years, 10.4%; CI 4.5-16.3 to 75+ years, 16.8%; CI 10.9-22.8) and NSW (35-44 years, 8.4%; CI 6.5-10.4 to 75+ years, 12.3%; CI 10.2-14.5). In contrast, the lowest rates of vegetable intake were reported in persons aged 16-34 years across HNE health region (16-24 years, 7.1%; CI 0.8-13.3 to 25-34 years, 7.0%; CI 0.6-13.5) and NSW (16-24 years, 7.7%; CI 5.2-10.3 to 25-34 years, 8.1%; CI 5.8-10.5) [graph 4].

CONCLUSION

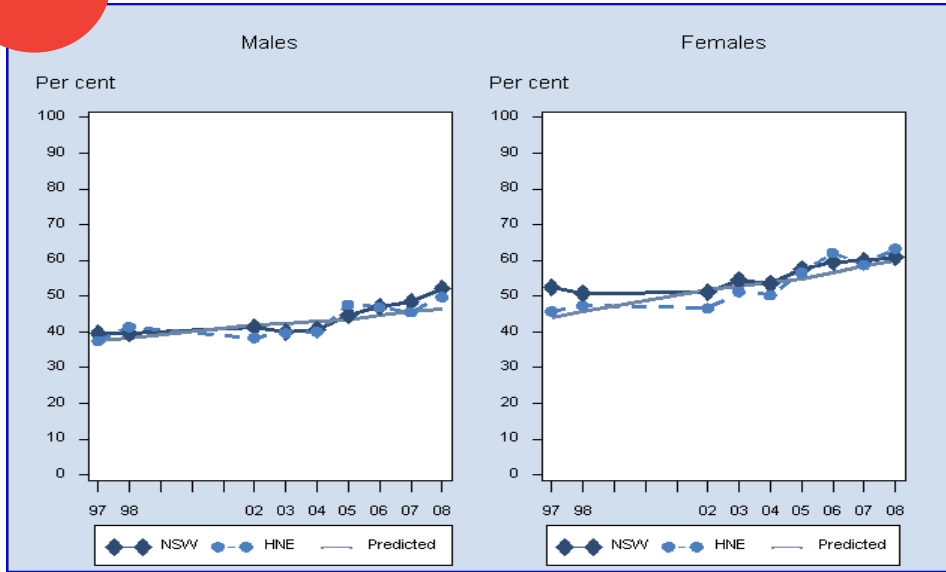
Between 1997 and 2008 an increase in the recommended consumption of fruit and vegetables across the HNE health region and NSW has been observed. Despite the overall reported increase only 56.6% of HNE health region residents consume the recommended serves of fruit and a smaller proportion (12.5%) consume the recommended serves of vegetables per day. With men over this same period reducing their recommended consumption of vegetables. Males and persons aged 25-44 years (for fruit) and 16-34 years (for vegetables), across the HNE health region and NSW were most likely to report low levels of recommended consumption. The findings presented within this HBO may be useful in guiding the development of Population Health strategies targeting fruit and vegetable consumption across the HNE health region.

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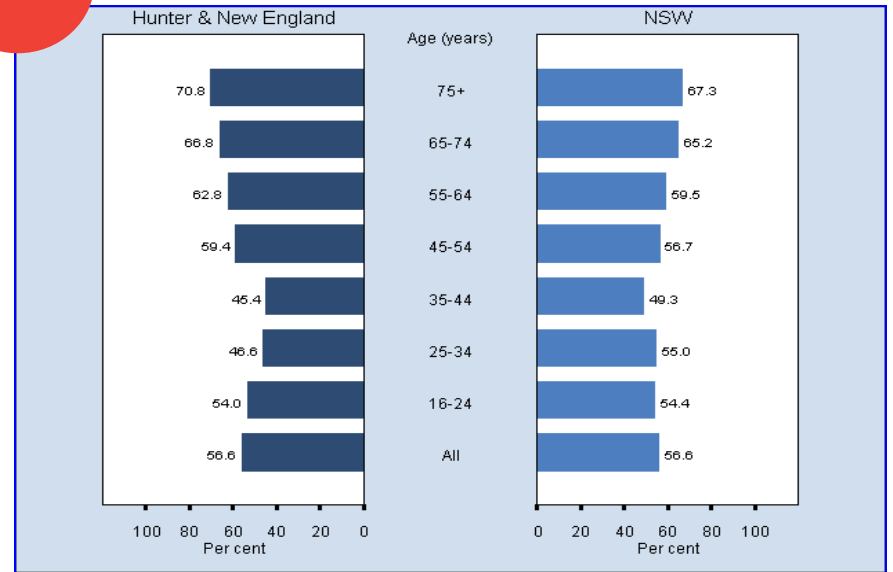
Graph 1

Hunter & New England, recommended fruit consumption by year, persons aged 16 years and over, NSW, 1997-2008



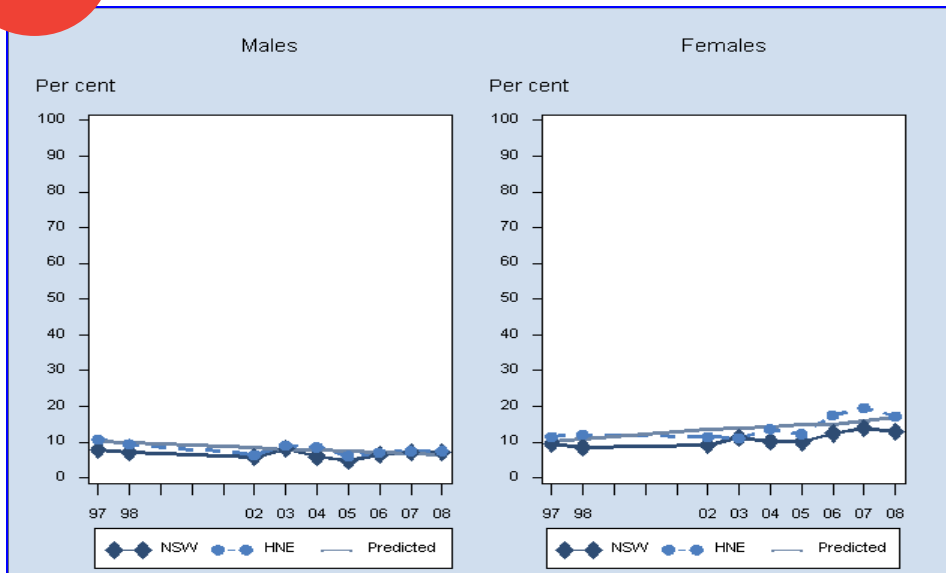
Graph 3

Hunter & New England, recommended fruit consumption by age, persons aged 16 years and over, NSW, 2008



Graph 2

Hunter & New England, vegetable consumption by year, persons aged 16 years and over, NSW, 1997-2008



Graph 4

Hunter & New England, recommended vegetable consumption by age, persons aged 16 years and over, NSW, 2008

