

45-TO-49 YEAR OLD CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION HEALTH CHECKS IN GENERAL PRACTICE: UTILISATION, ACCEPTABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

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POLICY CONTEXT

In 2006, the Council of Australian Governments identified the importance of promoting healthy lifestyles in order to prevent the onset of chronic disease. It proposed achieving this by supporting early detection of lifestyle risks and chronic disease through a health check in general practice for people aged 45-to-49. This has not previously been examined in the Australian context. This study looked at the utilisation, acceptability, and effectiveness of this type of health check in general practice through an intervention to support practices to provide health checks, interviews with clinicians, clinician surveys and surveys of patients invited to attend for a health check.

KEY FINDINGS

Acceptability and uptake

- The health check item was found to be acceptable to GPs with regard to fitting into practice and useful in providing an opportunity to deliver preventive care for this age group
- Nearly all patients who participated found attending the health check with their general practitioner was appropriate and would recommend that others attend
- Some GPs felt the item provided structure to existing preventive care, while for others it provided an incentive to deliver preventive activities which would otherwise not have been undertaken

Conducting the health checks

- Health checks often took more than one visit to complete. However, in lower socioeconomic areas where GPs deemed patients less likely to return, and there were greater numbers of patients for each GP, GPs tried to complete the health check in one visit.
- Division support and training assisted GPs to identify patients' readiness to change risky behaviour
- Despite the training, GPs did not feel confident or effective in addressing lifestyle behavioural change interventions with unmotivated patients, and there was a tendency to focus on physiological risk factors in contrast to behavioural risk factors
- Lifescrpts training was positively received and the resources were frequently applied
- GPs increased the amount of preventive care that they delivered, particularly with regard to providing advice. However, GPs did not regularly refer patients to other services

Impact and outcomes

- The health check resulted in 44% of patients making a lifestyle change. Positive changes for specific behaviours reported by patients were most notably for physical activity
- Patients indicated a greater readiness to increase physical activity and fruit and vegetable intake after the health check. However, these changes were not large enough to move people from being at risk to not at risk

Future use and development of the health check

- While there was some indication that GPs and practices will continue to use health checks, patients will be identified opportunistically for health checks, rather than by systematic recall.
- Recommendations for improving the health check item include:
 - Extending the age group to include patients in their 50s
 - Allowing the health check to be repeated at specified intervals
 - Improving arrangements for contacting Medicare

For more details, go to the [three page report](#).

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