

Commute time

Indicator overview

VicHealth Indicators Survey

VicHealth Indicators are used to measure community wellbeing with a focus on social determinants of health.

Survey topic areas include: wellbeing, healthy eating and sedentary behaviour, use of green space and safety, smoking policy, alcohol, using of social networking, participation in arts activities and the community, social attitudes, and work, life and time.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

PO Box 154
Carlton South, VIC 3053 Australia
T +61 3 9667 1333
F +61 3 9667 1375
vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

November 2012
ISBN: 978-1-922133-93-9
Publication number: K-040-KN

© Copyright Victorian Health
Promotion Foundation 2012

Introduction

More than nine million Australians commute on a daily basis (Pocock and Masterman-Smith 2006), spending an average of 3.7 hours travelling to and from work each week (Wilkins et al. 2009). Around 10% of workers spend 10 or more hours commuting each week, with longer commute times associated with working regular full-time hours, having a highly skilled occupation and living in a major city (Wilkins et al. 2009).

Health consequences

Commuting is associated with negative health effects (see also Sedentary behaviour overview sheet). Perceived stress during or immediately after commuting increases with commute time, lack of predictability or control associated with commuting, and crowding during the commute journey (Evans and Wener 2007, Hansson et al. 2011). Commuting is also linked with negative health outcomes not directly related to the commute itself, such as short sleeping times and low self-reported health (Hansson et al. 2011).

Time spent commuting can also mean that there is less time available for health-promoting behaviours such as physical activity and relaxation. However, not all commuting is detrimental to health. Active forms of commuting, such as walking or cycling, have beneficial impacts such as reduction in obesity and improved emotional state (Lindström 2008).

Social consequences

Longer commute time is linked to lower life satisfaction (Stutzer and Frey 2008) and increased absenteeism from the workplace (Hansson et al. 2011, Costa et al. 1988). Individuals who have long commutes are less likely to have to spend time socialising, or to belong to a sporting group or community organisation (Kelly et al. 2012).

A long commute time also impacts on family life. It is a recognised determinant of work-family conflict (Pocock and Masterman-Smith 2006) since it decreases the time available for parents to spend with their families. One study found that over 10% of working parents spend more time commuting than they do with their children (Flood and Barbato 2005).

Find out more

Centre for work + life, Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia.
www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/projects/sustainability-project.asp

References

- Costa, G, Pickup, L & Di Martino, V 1988, 'Commuting – a further stress factor for the working people, evidence from the European Community II. An empirical study', *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, vol. 60(5), pp. 377–385.
- Evans, GW & Wener, RE 2007, 'Crowding and personal space invasion on the train: please don't make me sit in the middle', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, vol. 27(1), pp. 90–94.
- Flood, M & Barbato, C 2005, *Off to work: commuting in Australia. Discussion paper*, The Australia Institute, Canberra.
- Hansson, E, Mattisson, K, Bjork, J, Ostergren, P-O & Jakobsson, K 2011, 'Relationship between commuting and health outcomes in a cross-sectional population survey in southern Sweden', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 11(834).
- Kelly, J-F, Breadon, P, Davis, C, Hunter, A, Mares, P, Mullerworth, D & Weidmann, B 2012, *Social cities*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne.
- Lindström, M 2008, 'Means of transportation to work and overweight and obesity: a population-based study in southern Sweden', *Preventive Medicine*, vol. 46(1), pp. 22–28.
- Pocock, B & Masterman-Smith, H 2006, *Work, families and affordable housing*, Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, Adelaide.
- Stutzer, A & Frey, BS 2008, 'Stress that doesn't pay: the commuting paradox!', *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, vol. 110(2), pp. 339–366.
- Wilkins, R, Warren, D & Hahn, M 2009, *Families, incomes and jobs, volume 4: a statistical report on waves 1 to 6 of the HILDA survey*, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.