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VicHealth commends researchers who find ground breaking link between TV viewing and mortality

Research published today by Professor David Dunstan of Melbourne's Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, for the first time suggests that the more time spent watching television the greater the health risk.

The study, **Television viewing time and mortality**, published in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, tracked the lifestyle habits of almost 9,000 Australians and found that every hour of television watched increased the risk of dying earlier from cardiovascular disease.

"This is important public health research," explained VicHealth Chief Executive Todd Harper, "because it highlights the health hazards of a society that sits too much.

"Our sedentary lifestyle is a key contributor to chronic disease and today we have evidence that sedentary behaviour, or sitting, for prolonged periods, increases the risk of obesity and deaths from disease."

According to Professor Dunstan, who is a VicHealth research fellow, this may have serious implications when you consider that television viewing occupies a large proportion of free time in the domestic setting for the majority of Australian adults.

Professor Dunstan, from Baker-IDI, says it's important to understand that it is not the television per se that is the problem – it is what people do whilst watching television, which is mostly sedentary.

The researchers believe a major explanation for this link between television viewing (and possibly other sedentary behaviour that involves prolonged sitting) and premature death, may be the consequence of reduced energy expenditure over prolonged periods.

"David Dunstan has undertaken extensive research highlighting that too much sitting has negative effects on health and that these effects are present even among adults who do sufficient amounts of exercise.

"We need to think about this research in other areas where we spend a large period of time sitting, such as in the workplace or in schools.

"This is a timely piece of research. There are a range of initiatives to tackle sedentary lifestyles that have been recommended by the Preventative Health Taskforce including:

- Standing up while on the telephone or watching television;
- Holding walking or standing meetings, where appropriate;
- Arranging regular (for example, half-hourly) short breaks during sit-down meetings.

"It's time we stand up for our health," Mr Harper added.

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