Asthma mortality in Australia 1960-2008.

Prepared by A/Professor Elizabeth Comino for the National Asthma Council Australia
A/Professor Elizabeth Comino
UNSW Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity.
University of NSW

There were 447* deaths from asthma in 2008. This was 16.1% higher than in 2007 where 385 deaths were reported and 11.2% higher than in 2006 where 402 deaths were reported.

76.7% (343) of asthma deaths occurred in adults aged 60 years or over and 90.8% among those aged 40 years or over.

For the 10-40 year age group, there were 36 deaths (43 among 0-39 years). This number is higher than in the preceding two years (2006: 24, and 2007: 35).

The following graphs show the age standardised mortality rates for asthma from 1960 to 2008.

Figure 1 shows the mortality for all people; the curve is overlaid with a curve showing a three year moving average for mortality and gives a better idea of the underlying trends in the data. After a steady decline from the late 1980s until 2004, mortality from asthma have continued to increase from 2005-2008.
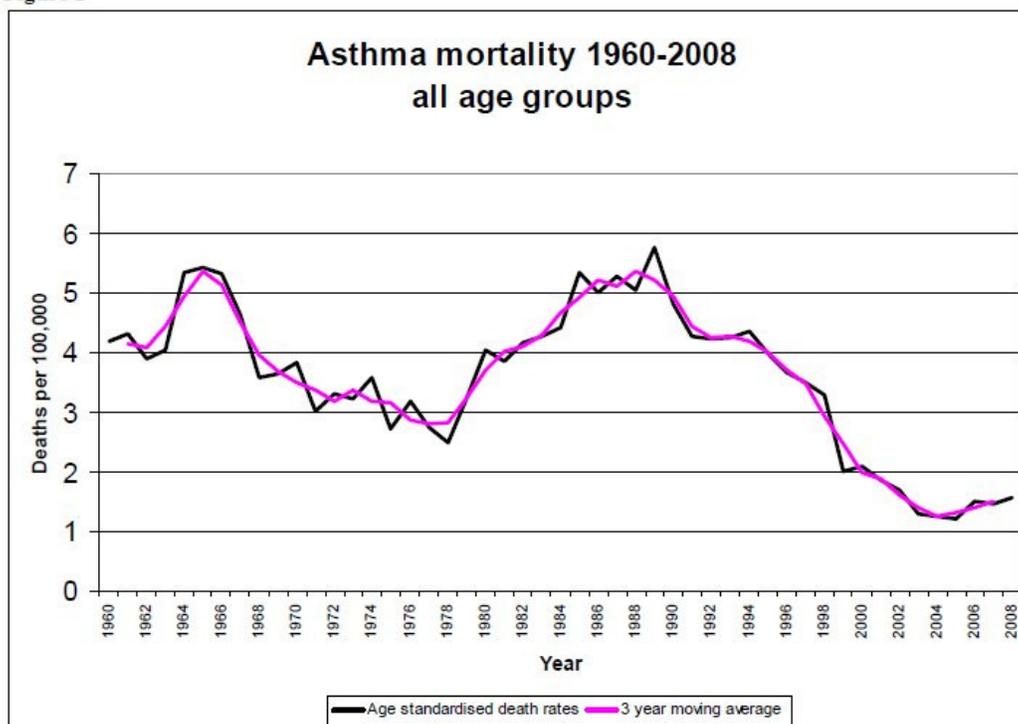
Figure 1

Figure 2 shows the same information (age standardised mortality and three year moving average) for young people aged 10-40 years and shows a similar trend to overall data.

Figure 2

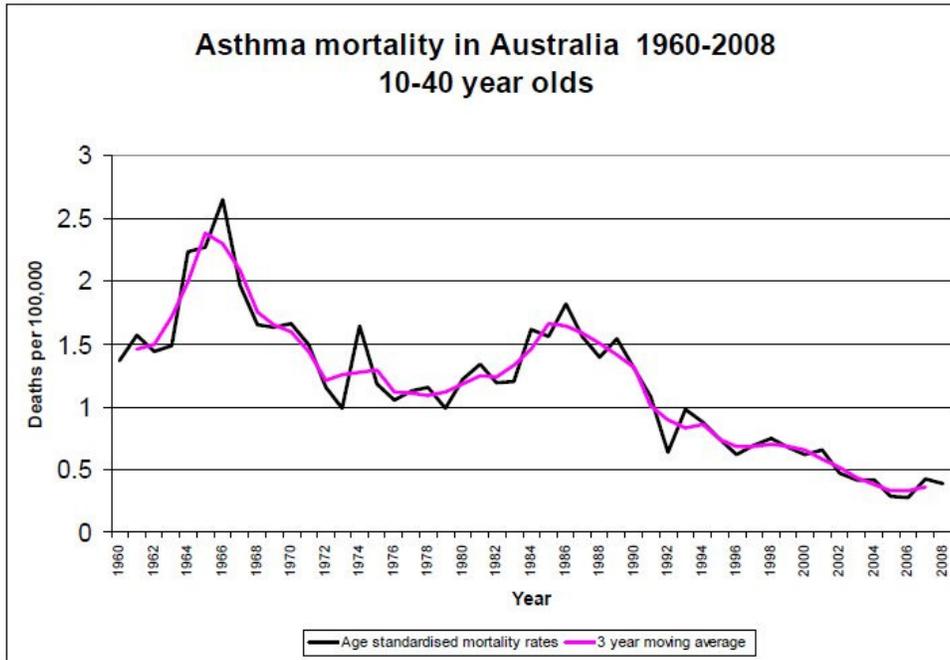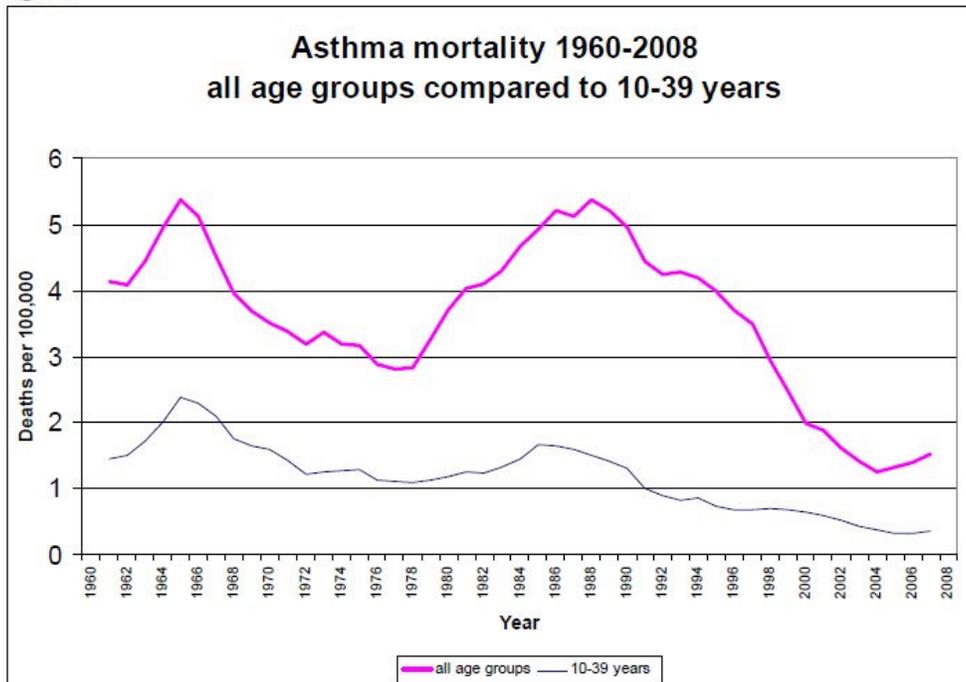Asthma mortality in Australia 1960-2008
10-40 year olds

Figure 3 shows the three year moving average results for age standardised death rates for all age groups and for young people aged 10-39 years. Although rates are lower for the younger age group, the graph shows that changes in rates overall have been lower although the overlying trends are similar.

Figure 3

Asthma mortality 1960-2008
all age groups compared to 10-39 years

In conclusion, the numbers of deaths due to asthma have increased in 2008 and this increase is reflected in age standardised death rates for both young people aged 10-39 years and for all ages. During the last decade overall numbers of asthma deaths have decreased by 35%. Most of this decrease has occurred in older adults.

this is based on the ABS 2010, Cause of Death data. Data cells with small values were randomly assigned to protect individual confidentiality. So, some totals do not equate the sum of their components, thus the figure of 447 deaths is used in this analysis.