

# The George Institute for Global Health – Sepsis study

Prepared for:



THE GEORGE INSTITUTE  
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# Methodology

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- This study was conducted online between 9–12 July 2020.
- The sample comprised a nationally representative sample 1,006 Australians aged 18 years and older.
- Following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates.
- The various generations as shown in the report are defined as follows:
  - Gen Z, aged 18 – 23 years (Birth year: 1997 – 2009)
  - Millennials, aged 24 – 39 years (Birth year: 1981 – 1996)
  - Gen X, aged 40 – 55 years (Birth year: 1965 – 1980)
  - Baby Boomers, aged 56 – 74 years (Birth year: 1946 – 1964)
  - Silent, aged 75 years and older (Birth year: 1918 – 1945)

# Key findings

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## Awareness of medical conditions (B1)

- Awareness of sepsis has increased significantly since 2016: Six in ten (59%) Australians, equivalent to 11.8 million adults, have heard of sepsis as a medical condition, compared to four in ten (40%) in 2016.
- Women are more likely to be aware of sepsis compared to men (66% compared to 52% - increased from 46% compared to 34% in 2016) – in fact they are more likely to be aware of all conditions listed with the exception of HIV/AIDS.
- Those 50 years and older (70%) are more likely than those 18-34 (45%) to have heard of sepsis – this increased from 47% and 31% respectively in 2016.
- Older generations are more likely to be aware of sepsis than younger generations (Silent 72%, Baby Boomer 71% , Gen X 62% compared to Millennials 47%, Gen Z 45%).
- Residents in QLD are the most likely to be aware of sepsis (67%), significantly more so compared to NSW (53%).

## Key findings ...continued

| Medical condition | 2016 | 2020 |
|-------------------|------|------|
| Sepsis            | 40%  | 59%  |
| Breast cancer     | 85%  | 87%  |
| Leukaemia         | 82%  | 85%  |
| Heart attack      | 84%  | 88%  |
| Emphysema         | 73%  | 69%  |
| Cystic Fibrosis   | 75%  | 74%  |
| HIV/AIDS          | 83%  | 87%  |
| Meningitis        | 75%  | 77%  |
| None of the above | 13%  | 9%   |

# Key findings ...continued

## Symptoms of sepsis (B2)

- The symptom of sepsis that had the highest spontaneous recall was ‘fever/ high temperature/ chill/ sweating’ (23%), up from 14% in 2016. Recall was also higher compared to 2016 for ‘rapid heart rate’ (4% compared to 3%), ‘rapid breathing’ (6% compared to 2%), ‘confusion/delirium’ (7% compared to 1%) and ‘organ failure’ (3% compared to 1%).
- Women are more likely to recall ‘fever/ high temperature/ chill/ sweating’ than men (32% compared to 14% - increased from 19% compared to 9% in 2016), as well as ‘rapid pulse/ heart rate’ (6% compared to 2% - increased from 4% and 1% in 2016) and ‘swelling/ inflammation/ redness’ (10% compared to 5% - increased from 4% and 2% in 2016).
- The Silent generation are more likely to recall ‘blood poisoning/ infection/ disease’ (28%) compared to Baby Boomers (15%), Gen X (11%), Millennials (5%), and Gen Z (5%).
- Recall of symptoms for sepsis was generally higher among those who know someone who has had sepsis compared to those who don’t/ are unsure if they do (e.g. 43% of those who know someone recall ‘fever/ high temperature/ chill/ sweating’ as a symptom, compared to 19% of those who do not know/ are unsure if they know someone).
- Those who are aware of the link between COVID-19 and sepsis are more likely than those who are not aware of the link to recall ‘rapid breathing’ as a symptom (11% compared to 4%), swelling/inflammation/redness (12% compared to 7%), fever/high temperature/chill/sweating (31% compared to 22%) and rapid heart rate (10% compared to 3%).

# Key findings ...continued

## Causes of sepsis (B3)

- One fifth (20%) of Australians recall a cause of sepsis just as an 'infection', up from 11% in 2016. The recall of 'Germs/toxins' and 'bacteria' has stayed level at 1% and 2% respectively since 2016. However, recall for 'immune response' (3%) and 'contamination of a wound' (7%) as a cause have increased since 2016 (1% and 1% respectively).
- Interestingly the proportion of Australians who say they don't know what the main cause of sepsis is has increased to 15% in 2020 from 10% in 2016.
- Women are generally more likely to be able to recall at least one cause of sepsis than men (52% compared to 33%).
- Older generations are more likely to be able to recall at least one cause of sepsis than the younger generations (Silent 52%, Baby Boomers 53% and Gen X 47% compared to Millennials 34% and Gen Z 27%).
- Interestingly, Australians aware of the link between COVID-19 and sepsis are more likely to recall immune response as a cause of sepsis compared to those unaware of the link (7% compared to 3%).

## Key findings ...continued

- Australians who know someone who has had sepsis are generally more likely to recall at least one cause of sepsis than those who do not of anyone (66% compared to 39%).

### Know someone who has had sepsis (B4)

- 16% of Australians, the equivalent of 3.2 million adults, report knowing someone who has had sepsis when suffering from an infection, an increase from 9% and 2.1 million adults in 2016. Of the remainder, 77% do not know anyone, while 7% are unsure.
- Women are more likely to know someone who has had sepsis compared to men (19% compared to 13%).
- Only 6% of Gen Z report that they know someone, which is significantly less than Millennials (16%), Gen X (21%), Baby Boomers (15%) and Silent (14%).
- Australians in regional/ rural areas are more likely to know someone who has had sepsis compared to Australians living in urban/ metropolitan areas (22% compared to 13%).
- One fifth (20%) of Australians who were previously aware of Sepsis know someone who has had it when suffering from an infection, which is twice as likely than those not previously aware (10%).

## Key findings ...continued

### Proportion of deaths from Sepsis (B5)

- Over half (53%) of Australians are unsure what the mortality rate of sepsis is, down from 58% in 2016.
- Only 4% of Australians believe the mortality rate to be 1 in 3, equal to the findings in 2016. Over a third (36%) of Australians believe the death rate to be lower than 1 in 3 (up from 33% in 2016), and 6% higher than 1 in 3 (equal to 2016).
- 18-24 year olds (44%) are more likely to underestimate the mortality rate, believing it to be less than 1 in 3, compared to those 50 years and older (31%), however this is to a lesser extent compared to 2016 (54% and 30% respectively).
- Younger generations are more likely to believe the proportion is 1 in 5 compared to older generations - Gen Z (18%), Millennials (16%) and Gen X (11%) compared to Baby Boomers (5%).
- Interestingly, Australians previously aware of sepsis are more likely to believe the proportion to be lower than 1 in 3 compared to those previously unaware (39% compared to 33%).
- Furthermore, Australians who know someone who has had sepsis when suffering from an infection are more likely than those who do not know/ are unsure if they know anyone to believe the mortality rate is 1 in 10 or less (41% compared to 22%).

## Key findings ...continued

| Proportions    | 2016 | 2020 |
|----------------|------|------|
| 1 in 20        | 12%  | 12%  |
| 1 in 10        | 13%  | 13%  |
| 1 in 5         | 8%   | 11%  |
| 1 in 3         | 4%   | 4%   |
| 1 in 2         | 2%   | 2%   |
| More than half | 4%   | 4%   |
| Don't know     | 58%  | 53%  |

## Key findings ...continued

### Awareness of COVID-19 and Sepsis link (B6).

- 17% of Australians, the equivalent of 3.5 million adults, are aware of the link between COVID-19 and sepsis.
- This includes, 11% that are aware of the link and that sepsis can cause death in those diagnosed with COVID-19 and 6% that are aware of the link but not that sepsis can cause death in those diagnosed with COVID-19.
- More than eight in ten (83%) are unaware of the link between COVID-19 and sepsis.
- Millennials are the generation most likely to be aware of the link between COVID-19 and sepsis (23%), significantly more so than Baby Boomers (13%) and the Silent Generation (11%).
- Australians who know someone who has had sepsis are more likely to be aware of the link with COVID-19, compared to those who do not know/ are unsure if they know anyone who has had sepsis (39% compared to 13%).