



**MEDIA
RELEASE**



Friday 27 August 2021

NEW REPORT ON ANTIMICROBIAL USE AND RESISTANCE IN AUSTRALIA

The *Fourth Australian report on antimicrobial use and resistance in human health* (AURA 2021), released by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) today, highlights the ongoing public health and safety threat posed by antimicrobial resistance.

The most comprehensive report produced on Australian antimicrobial use and resistance trends to date has found that while antimicrobial use in the community is decreasing, overprescribing and inappropriate prescribing continues to be a problem. Antimicrobial resistance to commonly prescribed antibiotics remains an ongoing threat.

Antimicrobial resistance is driven by the overuse and misuse of antimicrobials (including antibiotics). It is projected that, between 2015 and 2050, more than 10,000 Australians will die as a result of antimicrobial resistance.

While AURA 2021 found that overall use of antibiotics in the community has continued to decline since 2015, Australia continues to prescribe antimicrobials at much higher rates than most European countries, and in Canada.

In 2019, more than 40% of the Australian population (just over 10 million people) had a least one antimicrobial dispensed in the community, and more than 26.6 million prescriptions were dispensed for antimicrobials. The 2020 data showed a decline of more than 30% in dispensing of antimicrobials under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme during COVID-19.

“The gradual decline in prescribing since 2015 will need to be sustained in order to slow the spread of resistance,” said Professor John Turnidge AO, the Commission’s AURA Senior Medical Advisor.

“It is extremely concerning that AURA 2021 shows that many patients continue to be prescribed antimicrobials for conditions for which there is no evidence of benefit – including more than 80% of patients with acute bronchitis and acute sinusitis,” he said.

AURA 2021 shows that antimicrobial use has increased in hospitals, and the rate of overall appropriateness of prescribing has been static for some time. These data will be more closely reviewed to identify potential causes and enhance strategies to respond.

“There has also been a static rate of inappropriate antimicrobial prescribing in hospitals, particularly for chronic obstructive airways disease (COPD) and other respiratory conditions,” said Professor Turnidge. “AURA 2021 highlights the need for continued interventions to address the issue of inappropriate prescribing, and antimicrobial stewardship programs within hospitals are central to this effort.”

In addition, there is a long term high level of inappropriate antimicrobial use and multidrug-resistance in aged care homes, which highlights the importance of effective infection control and antimicrobial stewardship in that setting.

“These are again areas of opportunity for improvements in patient care through national and local improvement activities in relation to COPD and other respiratory illnesses, and the antimicrobials amoxicillin–clavulanic acid and cefalexin,” said Professor Turnidge.

The report warns that antimicrobial resistance poses an ongoing risk to patient safety, with common pathogens such as *E. coli*, which commonly causes urinary tract infections and may cause infections in the bloodstream, becoming increasingly resistant to major drug classes, and some organisms resistant to last-resort treatments.

Just over 40% of enterococci tested in 2019 were resistant to the antimicrobial vancomycin – a small decrease compared with 2017, but still higher than seen in more than 30 European countries. AURA 2021 also found that community-associated methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) continues to be the most common type of MRSA infection in remote regions generally, and in far northern Australia in particular.

“AURA 2021 clearly identifies focus areas that need increased and ongoing attention – including reducing inappropriate prescribing of antimicrobials, particularly for skin and asymptomatic urinary tract infections in aged care; and improving the appropriateness of antimicrobial prescribing for COPD and other respiratory infections,” said Professor Turnidge.

“The volume of data in the AURA Surveillance System allows us to identify and track national trends in antimicrobial use and antimicrobial resistance, and monitor the effect of changes in policy and clinical practice, to a level that has not previously been possible.

“This latest report is one of the most comprehensive of its type in the world. It will help give clinicians and health policy makers across Australia the data and information they need to develop targeted approaches to prevent and contain resistance and improve the safety of care provided to patients in hospitals and the community, and aged care home residents,” added Professor Turnidge.

AURA 2021 will be launched in a webcast hosted by the Commission Chair, Professor Willis Marshall AC and Ms Sophie Scott today.

ENDS

Access the AURA 2021 report online from Friday 27 August at: safetyandquality.gov.au/AURA-2021

Tune in at 12.30pm – 2.00pm (AEST) Friday 27 April: <https://kapara.rdbk.com.au/landers/33e36b.html>

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About the Commission

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is an Australian Government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care based on the best available evidence. By working in partnership with patients, carers, clinicians, the Australian, state and territory health systems, the private sector, managers and healthcare organisations, the Commission aims to ensure that the health system is better informed, supported and organised to deliver safe and high-quality care. <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au>

About AURA

Since its establishment in 2013–14, the AURA Surveillance System has provided an increasingly comprehensive picture of antimicrobial resistance, and antimicrobial use and the appropriateness of antimicrobial prescribing across the acute and community sectors in Australia, not previously available. The Commission continues to work very closely with clinical experts, states, territories, the Australian Government Department of Health, and the private sector to ensure continuing provision of data to the AURA Surveillance System, and to promote analyses of those data.

AURA 2021 is the fourth in a series of national reports developed by the Commission to inform policy to prevent and contain antimicrobial resistance, and inform clinical practice changes, where needed, to improve patient care. AURA 2021 primarily focuses on analyses of 2018 and 2019 antimicrobial use and resistance data. Analyses of 2020 data from the National Alert System for Critical Antimicrobial Resistances (CARAlert) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule are also included.

<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/AURA>