

GBD study: SA's development vs health progress gap

South Africa has one of the greatest misalignments in the world between development and health progress. It is one of five countries where actual health burden rates far exceed what one would expect based on its income and education levels, plus fertility rates. So says the [Annual Global Burden of Disease Study](#).



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“Life expectancy in South Africa is rapidly increasing, but that doesn’t mean we’re enjoying healthier lives. Communicable diseases like HIV, car accidents, and waves of violence are taking the lives of far too many South Africans, especially young people. This is one of the few countries in the world where the number of healthy years that men and women can expect to live has fallen over the past 25 years. We have a lot of work to do,” said Professor Charles Shey Wiysonge, director of Cochrane South Africa and a co-author of the study.

The study’s main findings for South Africa include:

- A South African man born in 2016 can expect to live 59.2 years, an increase in life expectancy of 9.5 years over the past decade. A woman has a life expectancy of 65.5 years, up 13.2 years from 2006.
- But illness and injuries take away years of healthy life. A South African man born in 2016 will live approximately 51.5 years in good health; a woman only 56.1 years. South Africa is one of only a handful of countries where healthy life expectancy decreased from 1990, when it was 53 years for men and 58.6 for women.
- The top five causes of premature death in South Africa are HIV, lower respiratory infection, road injuries, interpersonal violence, and tuberculosis. The ailments that cause illness can be very different. While HIV is also the number one cause of disability in South Africa, other top causes of non-fatal illness are back pain, hearing loss, and depression.
- Deaths of children younger than five are a persistent health challenge. For every 1,000 live births, 43.4 South Africa children under the age of five die. That exceeds the global figure of 38.4, but is lower than in other southern African countries like Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Triad of troubles

Globally, countries have saved more lives over the past decade, especially among children younger than five, but persistent health problems, such as obesity, conflict, and mental illness, comprise a “triad of troubles,” and prevent people from living long, healthy lives.

This year's version study comprises five peer-reviewed papers, and was published in the *The Lancet*. The five papers provide in-depth analyses of [life expectancy and mortality](#), [causes of death](#), [overall disease burden](#), [years lived with disability](#), and [risk factors that lead to health loss](#).

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