

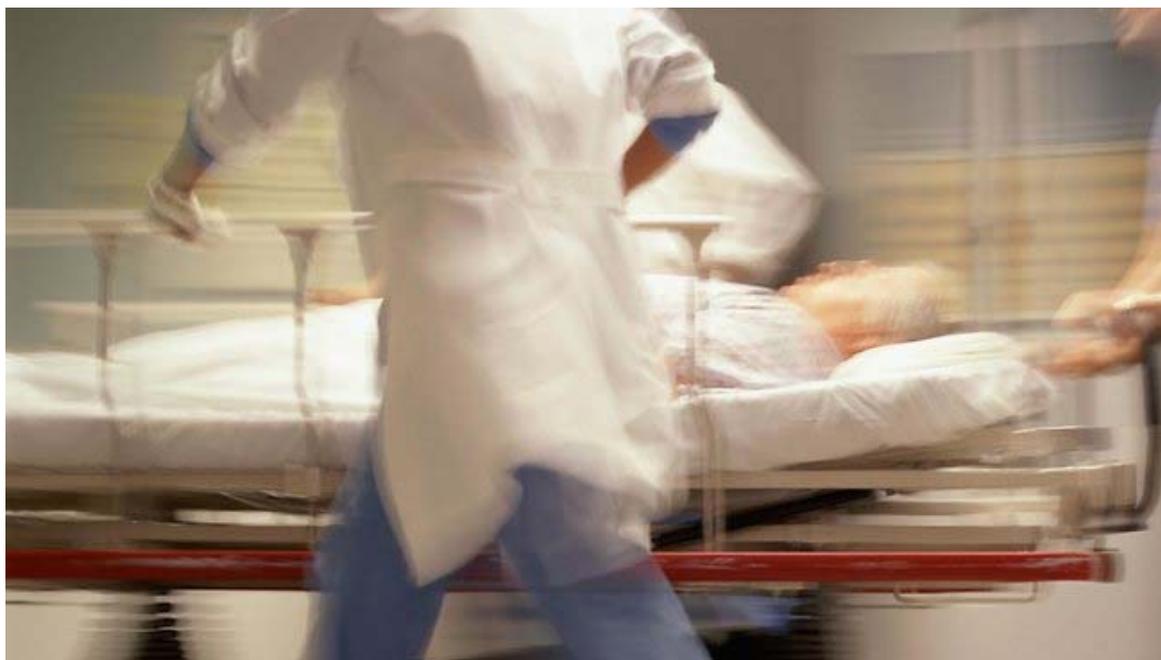
Lifestyle

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Inflammatory bowel disease in Aussies tipped to rise

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More than 75,000 Australians have Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. Picture: Thinkstock

Source: Supplied

IT'S a pain in the guts that's putting a hole in the nation's pocket and experts want it nipped in the bud.

Australia has one of the highest rates of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) in the world, and the problem is getting worse.

But the lifelong disease that mostly affects young people has a low profile, even though it cost the national economy more than \$US360 million (\$352.8 million) last year.

The number of Australians with IBD is expected to grow from 75,000 to 100,000 by 2023.

Experts say more young people are being diagnosed with IBD - which includes Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis - every year.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned by Crohn's and Colitis Australia calls for a national approach to IBD care.

Gastroenterologist Dr Greg Moore says at the moment, access to appropriate treatment is inconsistent, and patients usually only see specialists when the problem flares.

But relapses are unpredictable and failing to treat IBD when its active can lead to prolonged exposure to medications, adverse side effects, potentially invasive surgery or even death.

Dr Moore says government funding for IBD nurses will help ensure patients are treated sooner, avoiding unnecessary surgeries, hospital stays and pain.

"If we have specialist IBD nurses, they're readily accessible and can act as a point of triage so we can get patients in that need to be seen urgently and nip problems in the bud," he said.

The cause of IBD is unknown, but it is more common in developed countries and possibly to do with hygienic living or diet.

Dr Moore says GPs have poor knowledge of the condition and there is no permanent source of government funding for IBD nurses.

"IBD ticks all boxes for a chronic condition. It has elements that are preventable, keeping people out of hospital and improving productivity, yet we can't seem to attract funding or interest," he says.

INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE FACTS

- * More than 75,000 Australians have Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).
 - * The chronic disease affects about one in 250 Australians aged 5-49.
 - * Australian has one of the highest rates of IBD in the world and each year more young people are being diagnosed.
 - * The number of Australians with IBD is expected to rise dramatically within the next decade to 100,000.
 - * Research estimates national total hospital costs for IBD are about \$100 million a year.
 - * Crohn's disease is incurable and linked to a 47 per cent increase in mortality risk.
 - * Ulcerative colitis is only curable through radical surgery. If untreated, it may also lead to death.
 - * Typical symptoms are frequent and urgent need to use the toilet, diarrhoea, bleeding, loss of appetite, fatigue and weight loss.
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