

Killer disease hot spots in the inner city

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Suburbs in the electorates of Victoria Park, Mt Lawley and South Perth have been revealed as WA's killer disease hot spots, accounting for the highest numbers of deaths from smoking, obesity and alcohol.

An analysis of deaths by electorates, believed to be the first of its kind in the world, is being released today by the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA and the Australian Medical Association to pressure MPs into doing more to prevent so-called lifestyle diseases.

The report by Dr David Preen from the University of WA shows that in the five years from 2001, more than 26,000 West Australians died from preventable causes such as heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and alcohol abuse. Of those, the most deaths, 1065, were in the electorate of Victoria Park, which includes Lathlain, St James and Carlisle.

In the electorate of Mt Lawley, which includes Coolbinia and Yokine, there were 805 preventable deaths, while in South Perth, which takes in suburbs such as Como and Salter Point, 773 people died prematurely.

The top 10 death hot spots also included the electorates of Nedlands, Cottesloe and Marylands. Deaths from

smoking were highest in Mandurah, Rockingham and Victoria Park.

Institute director Mike Daube and AMA president Rosanna Capolingua said the figures were likely to underestimate the toll from smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise and alcohol. Only 2 per cent of health spending in WA went on public health and much of this was on services such as immunisation and screening programs.

Professor Daube said that while the figures were based on raw numbers not adjusted for population, it was clear that prevention had been the poor relation in health for too long.

"This publication is aimed squarely at the consciences of politicians and they can now see exactly how many deaths in their electorates should have been prevented," he said. "It is incredibly frustrating that so many politicians pay lip service to prevention but do nothing about it."

University of WA public health expert D'Arcy Holman said about two-fifths of premature death and disability could be prevented if more money was spent tackling the most important health risk factors.

"Looking at this report, we see hundreds of recent preventable deaths in every WA electorate and these place the contesting parties in the State election on notice that it's not enough to open new hospitals," he said.