



1960 – 1969

NEW CHALLENGES

In 1961 the contraceptive pill was introduced along with sex education, and by 1965 the birthrate had dropped to Second World War levels. The nation was prosperous but worried by the external threat of communism. Young men were sent to fight in Vietnam, while many Australians took to the streets in protest against the war.

The Department of Health now administered part, or all, of 22 Acts covering health, aged care, pensions and insurance issues. This presented substantial management challenges and careful arrangements with the States who delivered most of the nation's health programs. In July 1964 the Department underwent a major reorganisation to cater for the increase in functions. The Department also acquired its first computer in 1965 to handle the large number of claims by chemists under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

There was a tremendous growth in expenditure on medical benefits, pensions, services to school children, campaigns and technology. Overall, spending went from \$143 million in 1960-61 to over \$426 million in 1970-71.

The greatest proportion of that money went on pharmaceuticals. Indeed, the authorities began to wonder if the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which supplied 70 per cent of prescribed drugs while patients paid only 26 per cent of their full cost, was causing an excessive dependence on legal medications. To try to curb overuse of drugs, a National Standing Control Committee on Drugs of Dependence was established in 1969 to oversee the production of education material for the States and a system to monitor legal transactions in narcotic drugs.

Investment in medical research was rewarded in the sixties, with two Australians winning the Nobel Prize for Medicine: Macfarlane Burnet in 1960 for his work on immunology and John Carew Eccles in 1963 for his pioneering research into the chemical means by which signals to the brain are transmitted by nerve cells.

While attention still had to be paid to combating tuberculosis and polio, the effectiveness of earlier campaigns allowed greater emphasis on prevention. Children were encouraged to attend national fitness camps that promoted a spirit of adventure, self-reliance and initiative. Research confirmed that smoking had harmful effects and the Department began to discourage its use.

Improved air travel meant the quarantine service had to deal with an increased threat of undetected disease entering the country. As well as policing entry points, the service conducted research, for example into seed borne diseases and fumigation methods. Quarantine officials also worked to coordinate efforts with overseas counterparts...



Aeroplanes and other traffic brought with them high-intensity noise that could damage hearing. The National Acoustic Laboratories developed programs to protect those exposed to such noise. It also invented a new hearing aid equipped with transistors, known as the CALAID.

Care for the aged was another area which saw some innovations. With private hospitals coming under severe financial strain in caring for long-term chronic patients, in 1966 the Government introduced subsidies to encourage the inclusion of nursing accommodation in homes for the aged. It was also aware that there was a lack of appropriate services to help the aged manage in their homes, rather than having to move into an institution. In 1969 grants were made available to the States so that they could provide home care services and develop senior citizens' centres, staffed with trained welfare officers. This marked the beginning of a general shift away from institutional to community care.

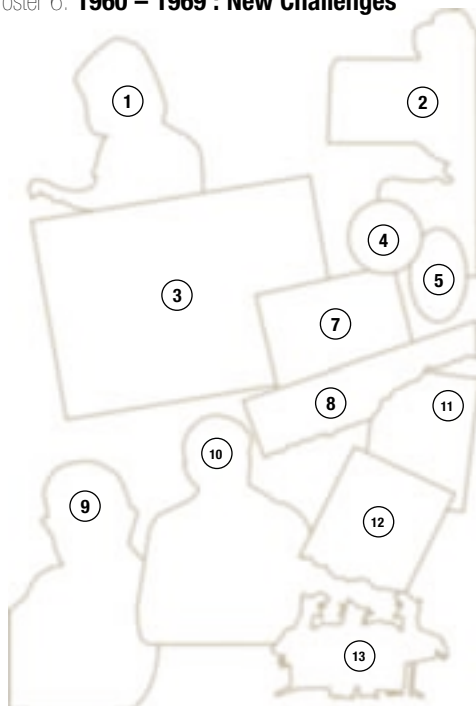
In May 1967 a referendum was passed by over 90 per cent of voters which removed the constitutional barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizenship and gave the Commonwealth the power to make laws for the welfare of Indigenous Australians. In 1968 the Federal Government provided the States with modest funding (some \$500,000) to reinforce their efforts in the field of Aboriginal health. The money was mostly used for capital expenditure and the salaries of predominantly white administrators and medical personnel. The health statistics remained alarming. In 1969 a survey in Queensland showed that the death rate for Aboriginal babies was between six and seven times greater than for Europeans.

By the end of the sixties pressure was mounting for changes to the health system. The Government responded by setting up the Nimmo Committee to report on the voluntary health insurance scheme. Concluding that the system was too complex, Nimmo recommended the introduction of a scale of common fees for medical services and procedures, as well as a subsidised medical benefits scheme with free insurance for people on unemployment and sickness benefits.

The Nimmo report heralded even more change in the seventies.

History Montage Services

Poster 6: 1960 – 1969 : New Challenges



- 1 – Photograph – Staff operating data punching machine in Brisbane office, 1964
- 2 – Photograph – Young girl having hearing tested at school, 1966
- 3 – Photograph – School children receiving Sabin oral vaccination against polio, 1966
- 4 – Departmental Logo
- 5 – Departmental Logo
- 6 – Floating text extract/filler
- 7 – Photograph – A general view of the East Arm Leprosarium, 1965
- 8 – Extract Canberra Times Newspaper 26.3.69 pg16, 'Nimmo report on Health Insurance'.
- 9 – Photograph – Sir MacFarlane Burnet, circa 1960
- 10 – Photograph – Sir John Eccles at work
- 11 – District nurse on evening care call, 1964
- 12 – Extract Canberra Times Newspaper 30.5.1967, Vote 'demands action on Aborigines now'
- 13 – Cartoon – A scene from the Department's cartoon 'The Gourmet's Dilemma', a migrant caught by officials trying to bring foodstuffs into the country

To view the series of montage posters representing the history of the Commonwealth Department of Health on the Internet, go to www.health.gov.au/history.htm