



Australian Government
Department of Health
and Aged Care

TODAY'S NEWS

Sunday, 31st December 2023

A more automated version of *Today's News* will be provided on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. It will still capture the main media stories, but will not include an Executive Summary. The report will be emailed to subscribers at the later time of 7:30 am.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The [Sun Herald \(page 1\)](#) reports that new health reforms that will be put into place by Health Minister Mark Butler next year will ban the use of disposable vapes while allowing nurses and GPs to prescribe vapes to people recovering from tobacco addictions, which may create a demand for treatment of vape addictions.
- The [Sunday Age \(page 1\)](#) reports that the number of traffic accident deaths in the state of Victoria has risen 24 per cent from 2022 to 2023 with a total of 296 people dying, the highest number of deaths since 2008.
- The [Sun Herald \(page 1\)](#) reports that organisations such as the Australian Medical Association have called for greater transparency in the details of road deaths, alleging that data such as the behaviour of victims and the possible causes of accidents are not shared with the federal government and the public.

- The [Sunday Age \(page 8\)](#) reports that WorkCover premiums have exasperated tightening Health services budgets in Victoria with the rise in compensation adding \$140,000 in average costs to smaller providers, potentially forcing cuts to staff.
- The [ABC \(online\)](#) reports that research conducted by the University of Melbourne has found that endocrine-disrupting chemicals have been detected in 95 per cent of people. The federal government has recently established the Industrial Chemicals Environmental Management Standard to manage the risks of chemical additives in plastic.

MINISTER BUTLER

GPs brace for rise in vaping addiction

Sun Herald, General News, 31/12/2023, Olivia Ireland, Page 1

Treating vape addiction will be a "new phenomenon" for the medical industry as it braces for the first stage of the federal government's world-leading reforms to limit usage to those with a prescription.[...] The changes are the first stage of Health Minister Mark Butler's suite of reforms next year.

Also reported by: [Sunday Age \(Melbourne\)](#), [Sun Herald \(Sydney\)](#).

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'Sick' system driving UK doctors to Australia

Sunday Territorian, General News, 31/12/2023, Danielle Gusmaroli, Page 12

When Prajwol Dhungana, himself a doctor, was told he had flu after waiting three weeks for a virtual appointment to see his GP, he ended up taking drastic steps. [...] He swapped notes with Australian Minister for Health and Aged Care Mark Butler and met health officials in Melbourne.

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MINISTER WELLS

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DEPARTMENT

As easy as going to the GP: Doctors push for accessible hormone treatment as children's waitlist swells

Sydney Morning Herald, Other, 30/12/2023, Michael Bachelard

The doctor in charge of Australia's busiest gender clinic for children and adolescents wants to see GPs giving hormone treatment to transgender children without the need for specialist hospital clinics such as hers. [...] The Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons has recently asked the federal health department to establish 21 Medicare items for gender-affirming surgeries to make it cheaper for patients.

Also reported by: [WA Today \(Online\)](#), [Brisbane Times \(Online\)](#), [The Age \(Online\)](#).

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CORONAVIRUS

3910 deaths in Australia from Covid in 2023, as new cases surge in NSW

Daily Telegraph Australia, Other, 30/12/2023, Madeline Crittenden

As Covid cases surge in NSW, the true toll of the virus in 2023 has been revealed, with new figures showing it was the underlying cause of more than 3900 Australian deaths this year. NSW Health has raised the Covid alert level to "high", and the fresh statistics show the virus was the cause of death for more than 1400 people in NSW this year.

Also reported by: [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#), [The Mercury \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [Gold Coast Bulletin \(Online\)](#), [Townsville Bulletin \(Online\)](#).

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Covid-19 cases Tasmania: Doctor urges at-risk people to take 'extra care' during New Year's 2023

Adelaide Now, Other, 30/12/2023, Sue Bailey

While the number of Covid cases in Tasmania has dropped slightly, more people were admitted to hospital in the past week – with a Tasmanian doctor urging those at-risk to take 'extra care' during New Year's celebrations. Ahead of New Year's Eve, Tasmanians are being urged to prevent the spread of Covid, and for at-risk people to take 'extra care' while out and about.

Also reported by: [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#), [The Mercury \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#).

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New normal? What COVID will look like in 2024

Daily Liberal, Other, 30/12/2023, Lanie Tindale

It's hard to believe that nearly four years ago the world closed for a virus few people had heard of previously - coronavirus. Since then, around 7 million COVID-related deaths have been reported to the World Health Organisation, including nearly 24,000 Australians.

Also reported by: [Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser \(Online\)](#).

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Australia's COVID cases are rising in the lead-up to New Year's

SBS, Other, 30/12/2023

Experts are urging people to take precautionary measures as the new JN.1 strain spreads throughout the community. Key Points COVID infections are rising globally, as the highly infectious JN.1 strain spreads throughout communities. Cases in Australia are thought to be much higher than those reported, due to low testing rates.

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AGEING AND AGED CARE

Finding a happy place Retirement active and inclusive for village people

Sunday Territorian, General News, 31/12/2023, Talara McHugh, Page 5

Territorians living in retirement villages are happier, healthier and more socially connected compared with those living independently, according to a new report released by the Retirement Living Council. The national "Better Housing for Better Health" report found that residents were 41 per cent happier, five times more socially active, twice as likely to catch up with loved ones, 15 per cent more physically active and had reduced levels of depression and loneliness.

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Nina has twice faced down death. But she still can't discuss it with her kids

SBS, Other, 30/12/2023, Sandra Fulloon

Nina Angelo is a lively, creative 76-year-old who describes herself as an artist, poet, storyteller and celebrant. She has also twice confronted her mortality in recent years. Nina underwent months of chemotherapy in 2020 after being diagnosed with stage four lymphoma, which she says had spread to her pelvis and spine. "My cousin, who is an associate professor of nuclear medicine, rang me and said: 'Nina, you have to have the chemotherapy, it's really bad and you've got to hit it fast'," she says.

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POPULATION HEALTH

Worst road toll in 15 years as COVID habits hit hard

Sunday Age, General News, 31/12/2023, Patrick Hatch, Page 1

The greatest loss of life on Victoria's roads in 15 years has prompted calls for stronger police enforcement to correct dangerous pandemic-era driving habits, and a government commitment to review speed limits on country roads. The state road toll in 2023 is 24 per cent higher than in 2022, while the number of passenger deaths has more than doubled over the same period. Nationally, road deaths increased 6.8 per cent by the end of November, but only 3.6 per cent when excluding Victoria.

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How does gas mining affect health in farming communities?

Sunday Canberra Times, Relax, 31/12/2023, Rod Taylor, Page 19

George Bender, a Chinchilla cotton farmer, committed suicide in 2015 after a 10-year battle with coal seam gas companies to stop damage to underground water bores. Since then, discontent in rural community has ebbed and flowed, but a simmering anger is always present. Yet the industry has continued with thousands of government mine approvals on good agricultural land.

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New rules and regulations fire up on vaping, while health gets shot in arm & Bali trips set to cost more

Sunday Times, General News, 31/12/2023, Page 4

The new year will usher in a wave of changes to laws, regulations, fees and charges, and taxes and benefits across Australia. Here's everything you need to know about the big changes coming in 2024. Vape crackdown Importation of all disposable vapes containing nicotine will be banned from January 1 under the "toughest laws" in the world.

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Harmful endocrine-disrupting chemicals are found in 95pc of people tested. How can you reduce your exposure?

Plastics and the artificial chemicals made to produce them are hard to avoid. But increasing understanding of the possible health impacts from the worst offenders has led the World Health Organization to recommend taking precautions to avoid them. In regards to health, chemicals known as endocrine-disrupting chemicals, or EDCs, are the most notorious.

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CANCER, HEARING AND CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Richmond mum Kerryn Miller urges Australians to donate blood and plasma

Daily Telegraph Australia, Other, 30/12/2023, Clareese Packer

It's taken more than 1000 blood donors to save Josh Miller, after the teen was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia when aged just nine in 2018. The 14-year-old from Richmond essentially had an "on call" list of donors to support him through extensive chemotherapy, a bone-marrow transplant and immunotherapy, with donors coming to his aid from across the country.

Also reported by: [The Mercury \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [NEWS.com.au \(Online\)](#), [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#).

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ABC News, ABC Evening News (Weekend), 30/12/2023, David Chau

Chemicals found in common plastics are known or suspected to be contributing to a number of common health issues affecting Australians, including cancers and infertility. The World Health Organisation says it's wise to take precautions.

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PRIMARY CARE

'Secret' road crash data could save lives: experts

Sun Herald, General News, 31/12/2023, Olivia Ireland, Page 1

State, territory and federal governments have been accused of gatekeeping road data which could be used to prevent fatalities after one of the worst years on the nation's roads. [...] The AAA launched a Data Saves Lives campaign, backed by almost 20 other national organisations including NRMA, RACV and the Australian Medical Association, in October to push for increased transparency of information.

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Bleak reminders of our summer holiday dangers

Sun Herald, Editorials, 31/12/2023, Page 28

Summer in Australia is a showcase of our world-famous lifestyle. It's a time when the country's beautiful beaches and breathtaking landscape take centre stage as we enjoy a break from the relentless routines of work, school and commuting. [...] Australian Medical Association president Steve Robson even goes so far to say a zero death target is not achievable without this data becoming publicly available.

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WorkCover hikes to hit health services

Sunday Age, General News, 31/12/2023, Kieran Rooney, Page 8

Victoria's health services face having to cut staff or services amid a budget squeeze they say has been worsened by the surge in WorkCover premiums. New data shows smaller providers have been forced

to find an average of \$140,000 this year in savings just to afford workers' compensation, with the threat of more hikes looming as the state government tries to overhaul its "fundamentally broken" scheme.

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This man has helped 60 people die. Now he wants the law changed to make it easier

Sydney Morning Herald, Other, 30/12/2023, Michael Bachelard

Nick Carr has helped 60 people to die. More or less. And it makes him a happy man. The St Kilda doctor is one of Victoria's most active prescribers of voluntary assisted dying medication, and he recently lost a legal challenge against the federal government over its law prohibiting discussion of suicide over a "carriage service", which includes phones.

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Queensland's first virtual hospital school helps children with chronic illness continue learning

ABC Online, Other, 30/12/2023, Arianna Levy

Eight year olds Ayla and Elise have been classmates since May, but they have never met. The year 3 students are both too ill to go into school, so they're enrolled in the Queensland Children's Hospital School's first interactive virtual classroom. When Ayla was diagnosed with Leukaemia earlier this year, one of her biggest worries was falling behind at school.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Isolated young adults lonelier

Sunday Mail Adelaide, General News, 31/12/2023, Lauren Novak, Page 7

South Australians are lonelier now than before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and it is almost a universal experience among young adults, new research has found. The Uniting Communities' Loneliness by Numbers Snapshot has been tracking the issue since March 2020. At that time, about 55 per cent of people felt lonely often, or sometimes. That spiked to 60 per cent a month later as authorities imposed strict pandemic lockdowns.

Also reported by: [Sunday Telegraph \(Sydney\)](#), [Sunday Mail Brisbane \(Brisbane\)](#), [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#).

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Ice baths are touted for psychological benefits. In Darwin they are helping people recovering from addiction

ABC Online, Other, 30/12/2023, Isabella Tolhurst

Ice baths, or cold-water exposure, have been long-touted for its psychological benefits. The sudden drop in skin temperature increases cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline, which creates a sense of alertness or awakening in the body. Darwin-based trauma counsellor Peter Bourke has seen how this can have positive impacts on his clients.

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HEALTH WORKFORCE

A country jackpot: \$10,000 cash incentive to lure GPs out bush

7news.com.au, Other, 30/12/2023, Jacob Shteyman

A \$10,000 one-off payment will be offered to doctors who move to one of 32 country towns in South Australia, including Renmark on the Murray River and the wine country town of Clare, to set up practice or work in a hospital. The new incentive, part of the SA Health Rural GP Agreement, was announced on earlier this month and comes on top of an existing attraction payment of up to \$50,000, which will also be expanded to include new sites.

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BENEFITS INTEGRITY

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HEALTH SYSTEMS STRATEGIES

Apps to (fast)track your wellbeing

Sunday Canberra Times, Relax, 31/12/2023, Karen Hardy, Page 13

There's no doubting we spend way too much time on our phones. Research suggests that the average Australian spends 5.5 hours a day on their phone. Finding it hard to fit regular exercise into your day? Think about those hours. But can the technology be put to good use?

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SPORT

Brave brain donation Sutton's goal for science

Sunday Territorian, General News, 31/12/2023, Camden Smith, Page 1

A Northern Territory football legend will donate his brain to science to help with research into sports-related concussion trauma. Trevor Sutton, the first player to kick 100 goals in the NTFL, has been diagnosed with a terminal form of bowel cancer that is expected to take his life within the next few years. When he dies, he has signed up with the Australian Sports Brain Bank to donate his brain, eyes and upper spinal column for medical research.

Also reported by: [Geelong Advertiser \(Online\)](#), [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#), [Gold Coast Bulletin \(Online\)](#), [The Mercury \(Online\)](#), [Northern Territory News \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [Toowoomba Chronicle \(Online\)](#), [Townsville Bulletin \(Online\)](#).

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THERAPEUTIC GOODS ADMINISTRATION

Wonders never cease

Sunday Times, General News, 31/12/2023, Page 12

The future is now as Dr 'Mystic Mike' Mosley predicts medical advances that will cure our ills and make headlines in 2024 It's been a good year for medical advances, from new drugs for Alzheimer's to new uses for artificial intelligence such as reading cancer scans. Looking forward into 2024 I'm expecting to report on lots more fascinating research so here, Mystic Mike pulls out his crystal ball and makes predictions about stories that will be making the headlines this coming year.

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