Victorian Agency for Health Information

Healthcare in Victoria: how do older Victorians fare?

Selected findings from The Commonwealth Fund's 2017 International Health Policy Survey of Older Adults in 11 Countries

VICTORIA State Government

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About the survey

The Commonwealth Fund

The Commonwealth Fund is a Washington-based foundation renowned for their research and promotion of international health system performance. Every year they conduct their International Health Policy Survey of 11 countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and the United Kingdom).

In 2017, the Department of Health and Human Services commissioned The Commonwealth Fund to oversample Victoria in their 2017 International Health Policy Survey of Older Adults in 11 Countries. The survey collected health and wellbeing information from a representative sample of 1,122 Victorians, 65 years and older. The survey was conducted by landline and mobile phone between March and June 2017. The response rate for Victoria was 26%, similar to the response rate for all Australia (25%).

The survey included questions about:

- access to health care
- out-of-pocket healthcare costs
- care for chronic conditions
- patient-centred care
- medical error
- medication management.

Success areas for Victoria

Areas of success for Victoria identified in the survey findings include:

- **Four out of five** older Victorians say they enjoy **good, very good or excellent health**.
- A **high percentage** of older Victorians with a chronic disease **have a treatment plan**.
- Older Victorians **experience good patient-centred care** with the majority saying that they experience continuity of care, they are engaged in their care and that they experience good communication with health professionals.
- Older Victorians enjoy **timely access to their general practitioner**, with the majority able to get an appointment either on the same day, or the next day when they are unwell.
- **One in six** older Victorians visit an **emergency department** over a 2-year period for an **avoidable condition**, which is a good result when compared internationally.
- A **high percentage** of older Victorians have their **medications reviewed** by a doctor or pharmacist each year.

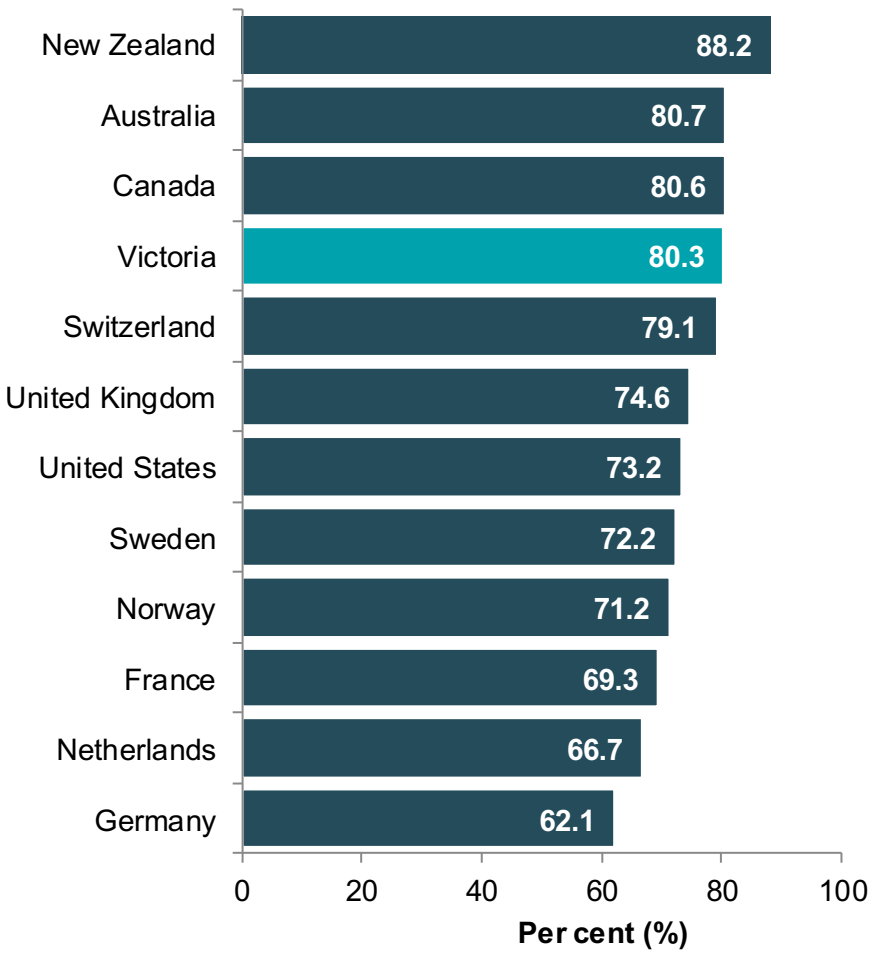
Key challenges for older Victorians

The main challenges identified for older Victorians in the survey findings:

- The **cost of care** is a key issue for older Victorians and the survey results show that many are skipping the care they need because of cost. This includes the cost of dental care, where Victoria ranks worst of all comparators. In addition, Victoria ranks worst of all OECD comparators when it comes to older adults who have problems paying medical bills.
- There are **inequalities in access to care and health outcomes** for vulnerable older adults in Victoria.
- The survey results show that the **prevalence of emotional distress is high** for older Victorians and **one in four** who experience distress are **unable to get professional help** when they need it.
- **Social isolation is a common issue** for older Victorians, especially for the more vulnerable.
- About **one in 10** older Victorians **with functional limitations doesn't get help with daily activities** when they need it.
- The survey results show that the **prevalence of high health needs is high** for older Victorians, which is largely influenced by the high prevalence of those with functional limitations who require help with daily activities.

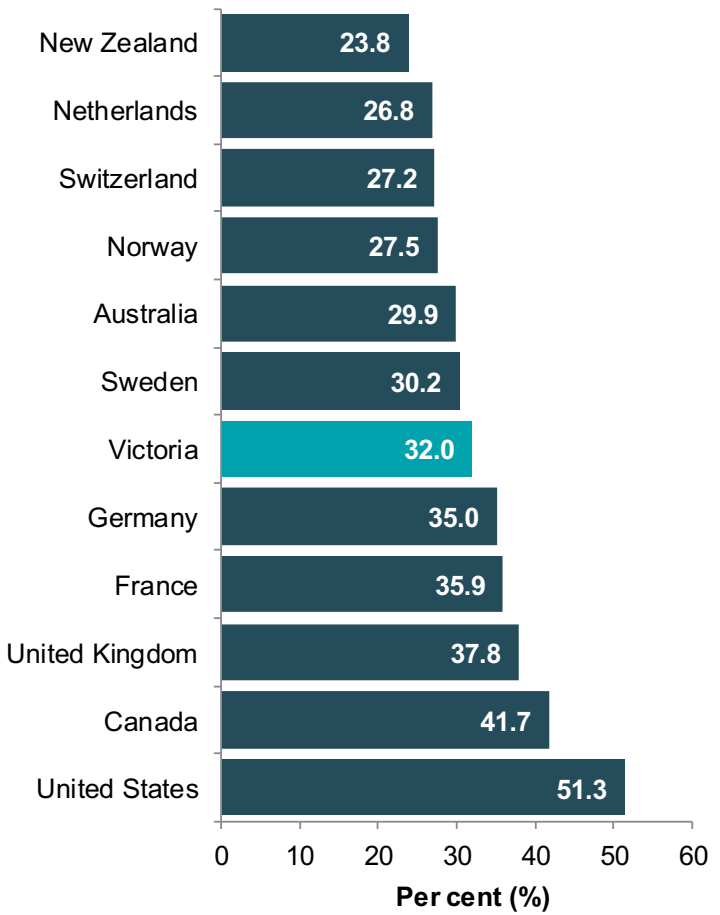
Selected findings from the survey

Good or better self-reported health



Four out of five older Victorians rated their health as good or better, similar to Australia, Canada and Switzerland.

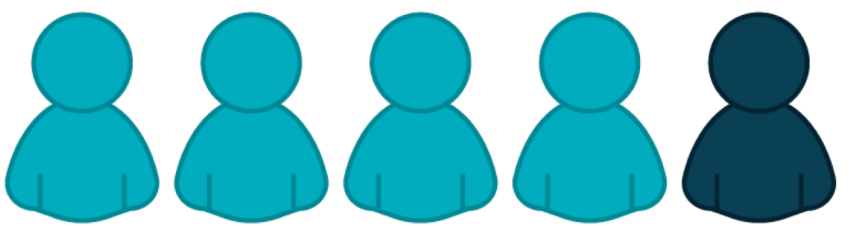
Diagnosed with two or more chronic diseases



One in three older Victorians have two or more chronic diseases (multi-morbidity)

The chronic diseases considered were joint pain or arthritis; diabetes; heart disease including heart attack; asthma or chronic lung disease such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema or COPD; depression, anxiety or other mental health problems; cancer; and stroke.

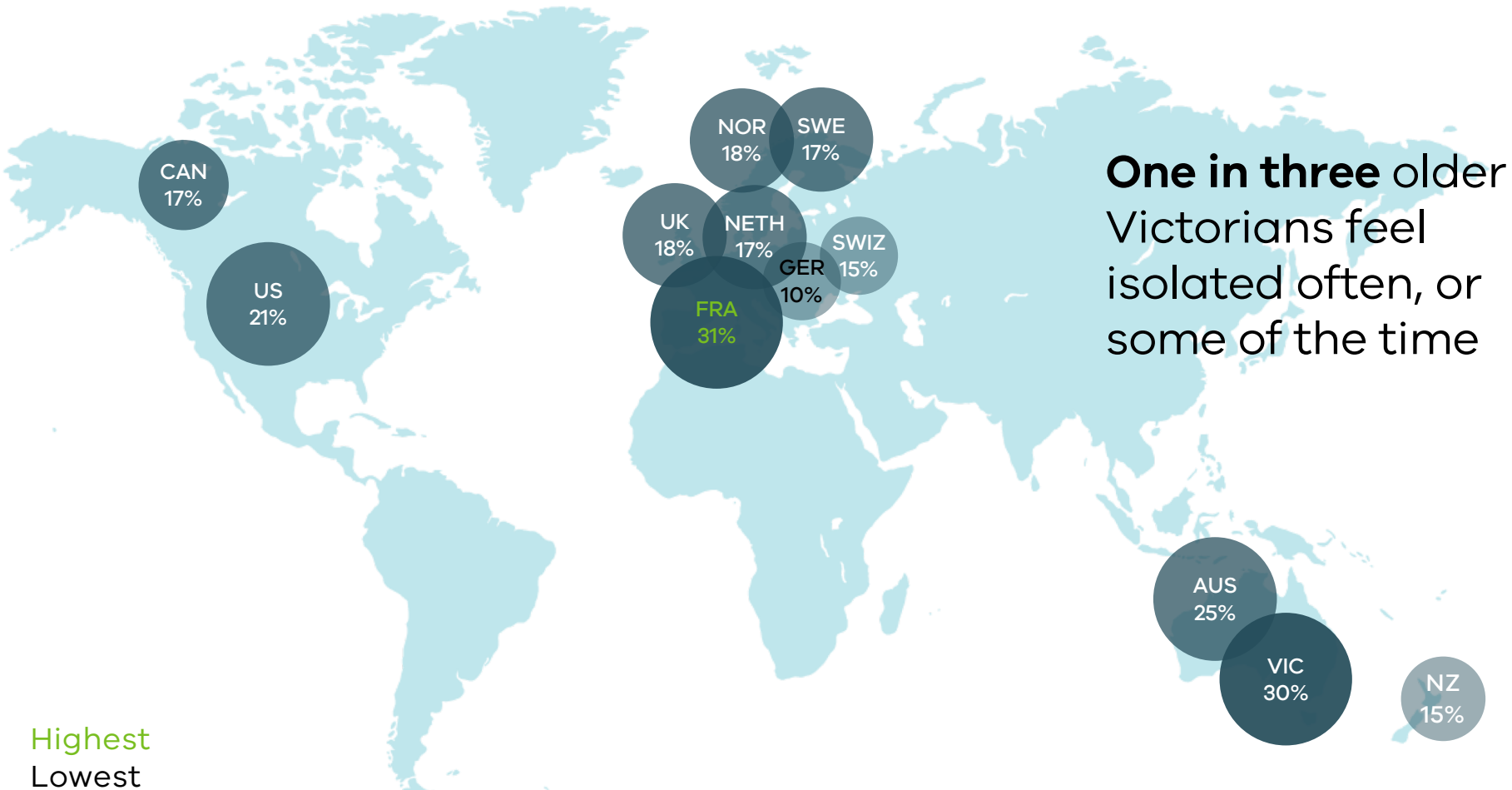
Diagnosed with a chronic disease and have a treatment plan



Four out of five older Victorians with a chronic disease have a treatment plan

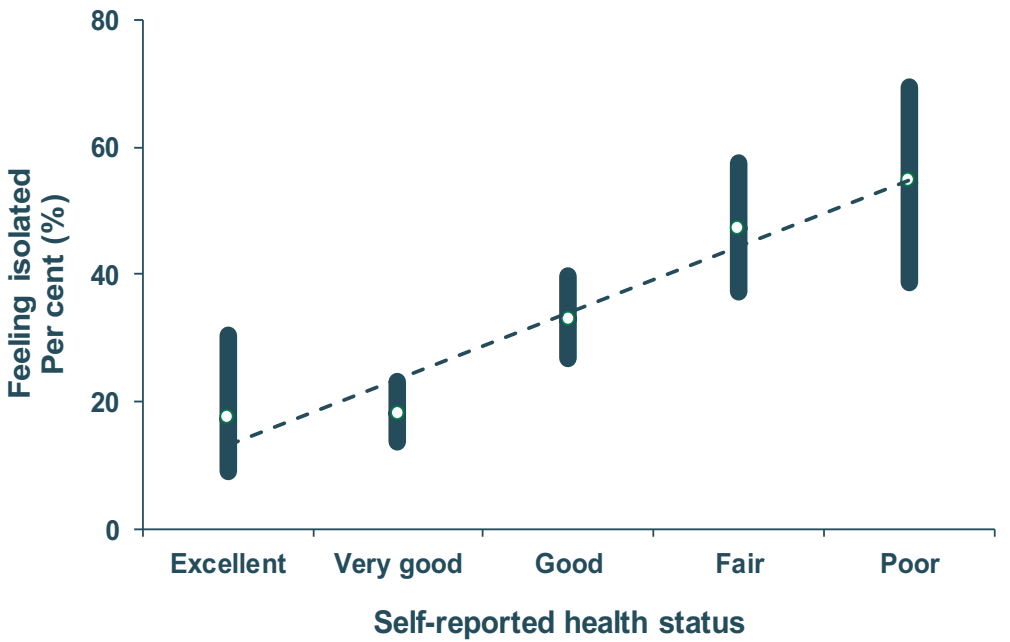
The chronic diseases considered were joint pain or arthritis; diabetes; heart disease including heart attack; asthma or chronic lung disease such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema or COPD; depression, anxiety or other mental health problems; cancer; and stroke.

Feel isolated often, or some of the time



One in three older Victorians feel isolated often, or some of the time

Relationship between feeling isolated and health status



The percentage of older Victorians who experience feeling isolated increases as health status decreases

Experienced emotional distress and unable to get professional help when needed

One in three older Victorians experience emotional distress over a 2-year period

And

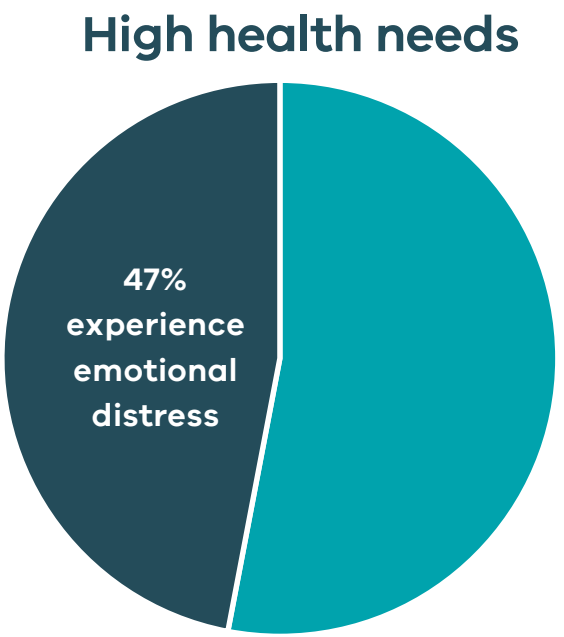
One in four who experience distress are unable to get help from a professional when needed

High health needs

Two out of five older Victorians have high health needs

'High health needs' were based on whether the respondent had three or more of the chronic diseases included in the survey and were currently being treated for them, or if the respondent had a health problem and needed help with daily activities as a result.
The chronic diseases considered were joint pain or arthritis; diabetes; heart disease including heart attack; asthma or chronic lung disease such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema or COPD; depression, anxiety or other mental health problems; cancer; and stroke.

High health needs and experience of emotional distress



47% of older Victorians with high health needs experience emotional distress over a 2-year period

'High health needs' was based on whether the respondent had three or more of the chronic diseases included in the survey and were currently being treated for them, or if the respondent had a health problem and needed help with daily activities as a result.

Needs help with daily activities and rarely, or never gets the help they need

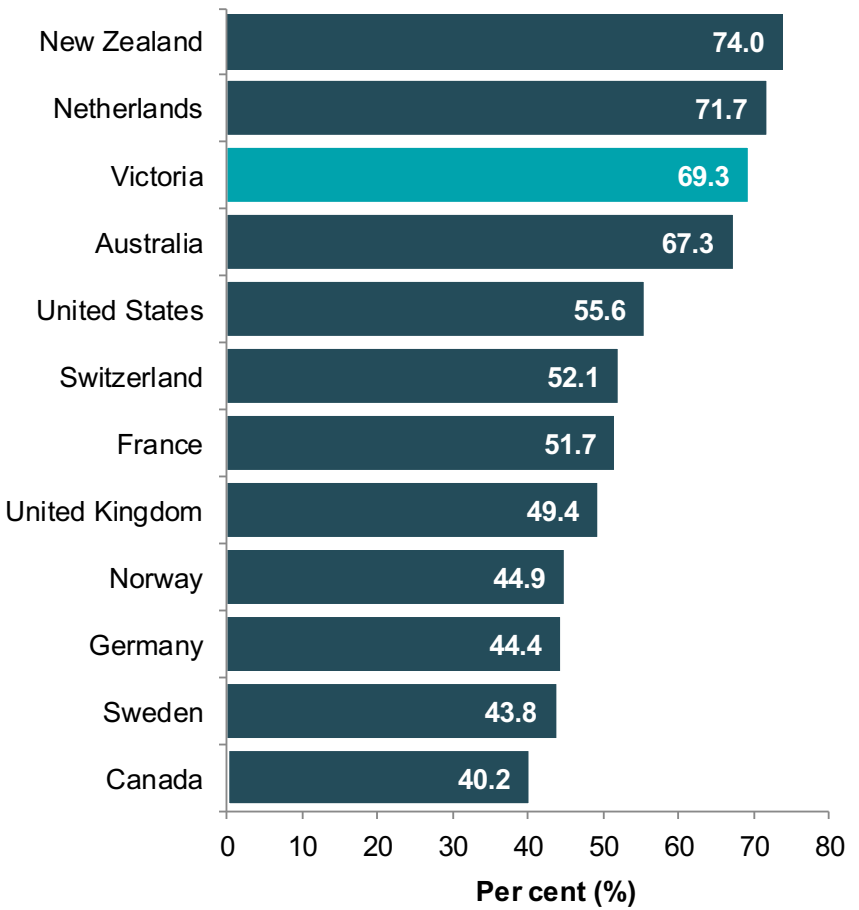
One in four older Victorians needs help with daily activities

But

One in 10 of those who need help rarely, or never get the help they need

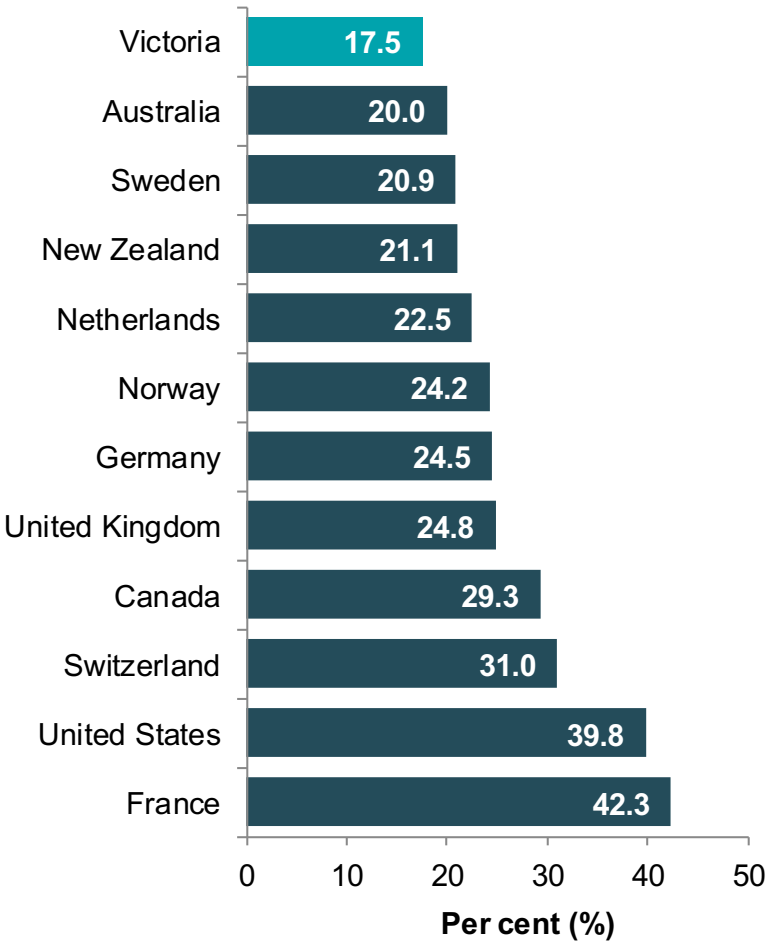
'Needs help with daily activities' – respondents were asked if they needed someone to help them with housework, preparing meals, managing daily medications or shopping because of a health problem.

Same day or next day appointment to see a doctor



Seven out of 10 older Victorians can get a same day or next day appointment to see a doctor when required

Avoidable emergency department presentations



One in six older Victorians visit an emergency department over a 2-year period, for a condition that could be treated by their regular doctor – a good result by international standards

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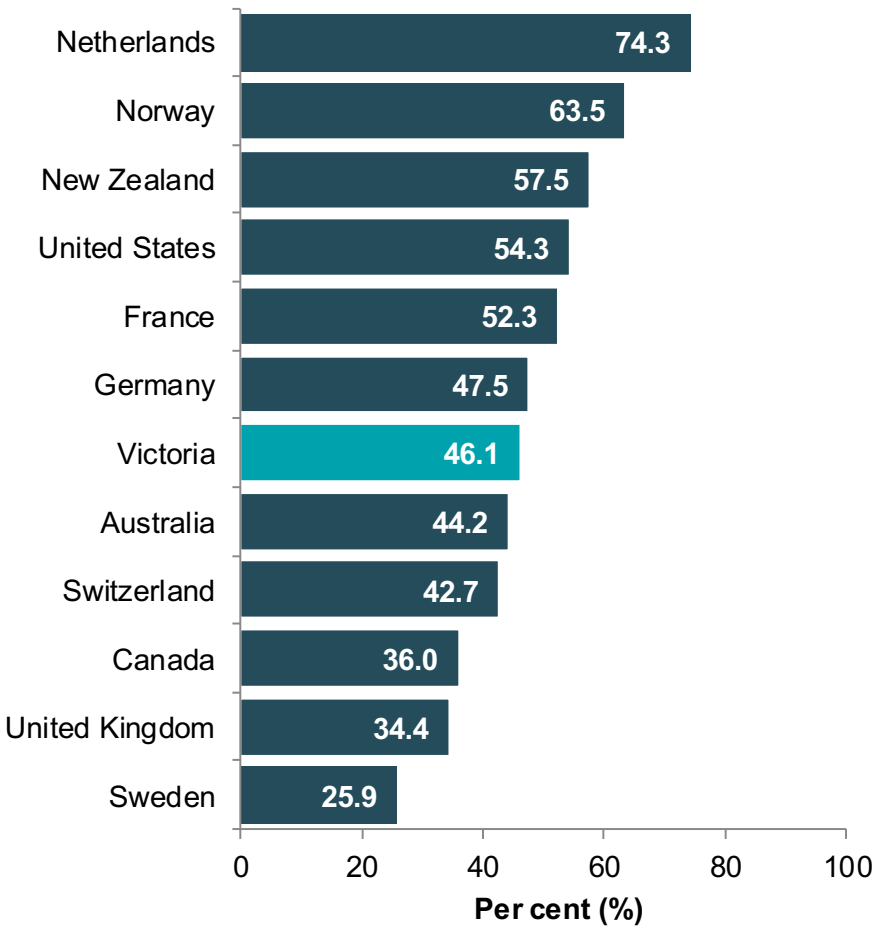
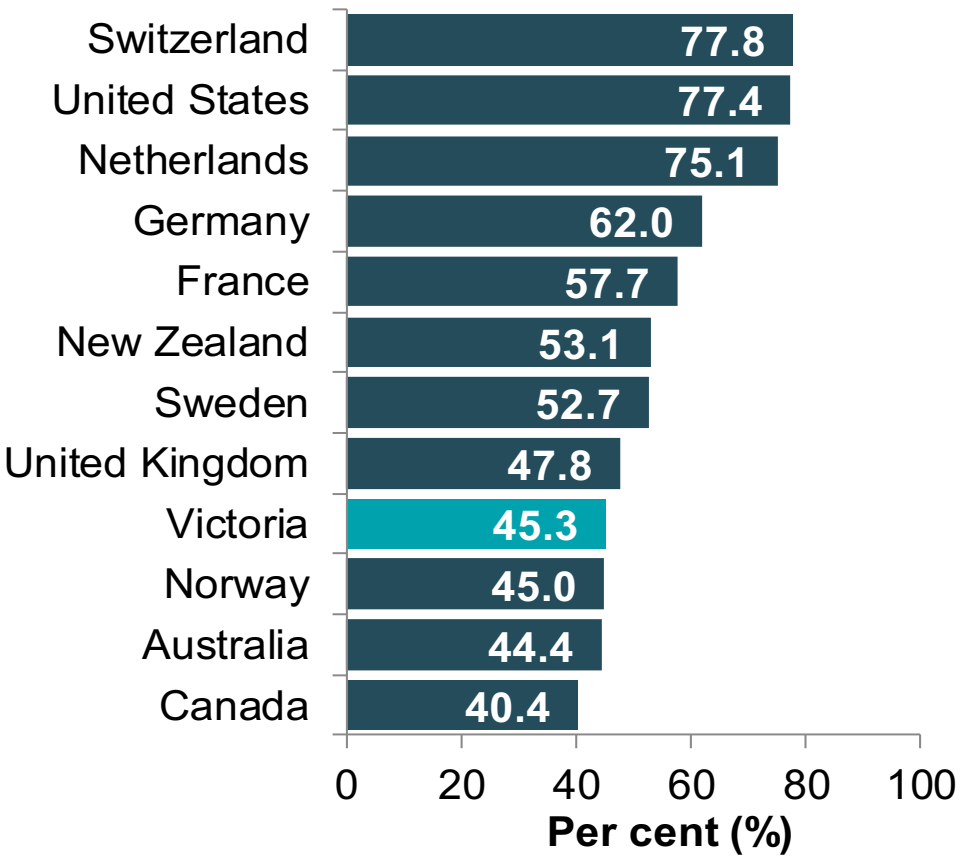
Easy access to after-hours care



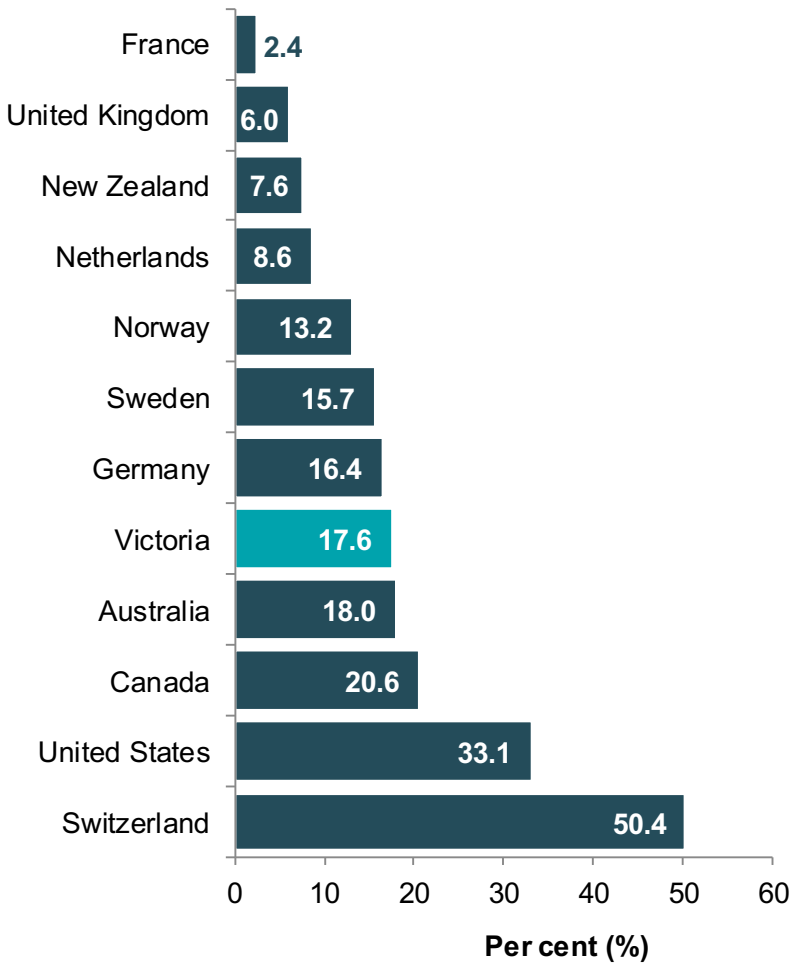
46% of older Victorians find it easy to get medical care after-hours when needed, without going to a hospital emergency department

Access to a specialist



45% of older Victorians wait less than four weeks to see a specialist

Out-of-pocket costs for care



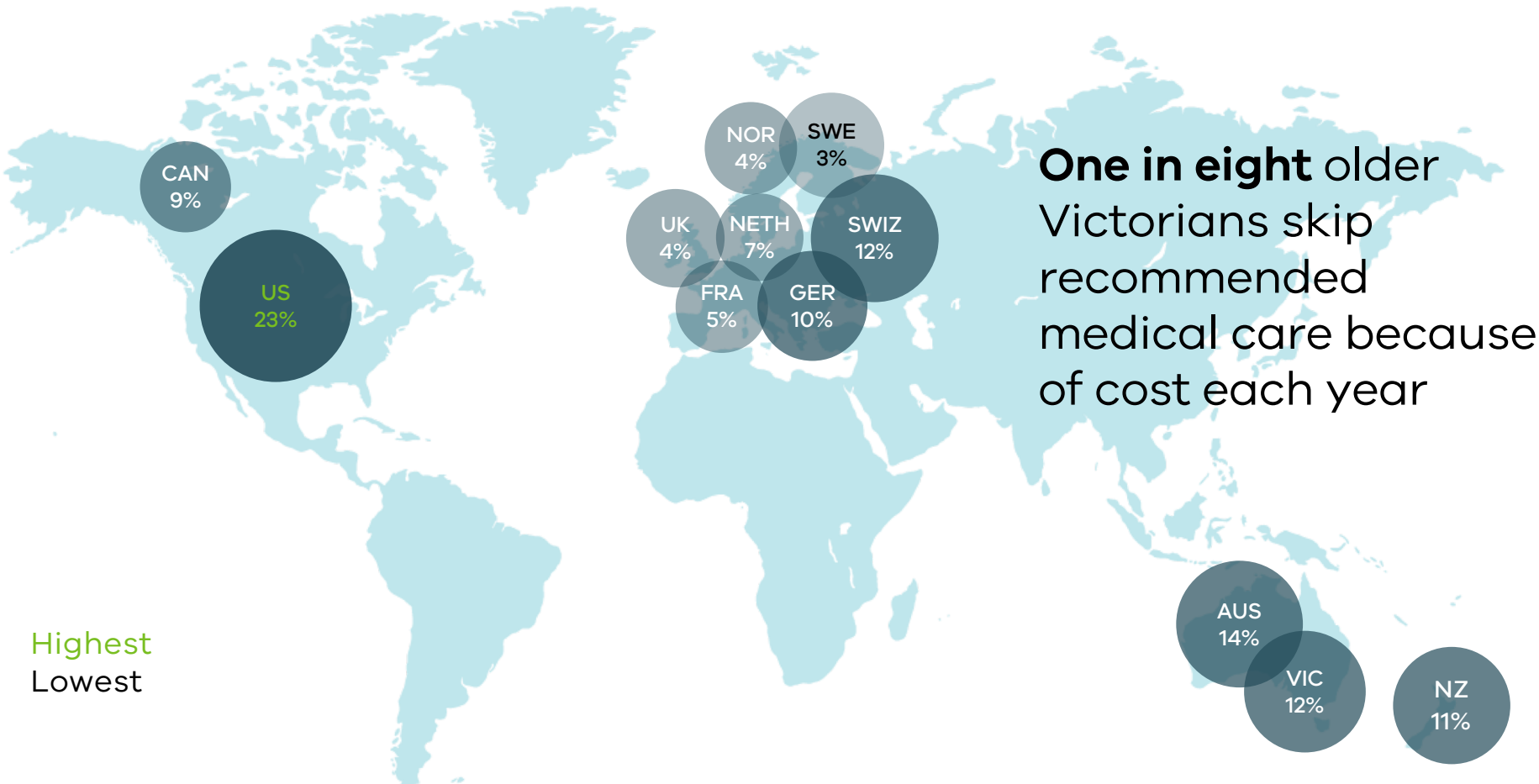
One in six older Victorians spends $1,000 or more each year in out-of-pocket healthcare costs

The question about out-of-pocket costs was asked in local currencies (Euros, Australian dollars, etc.), but responses were converted to US dollars for analysis. Note that USD $1,000 was equivalent to about AUD $1,350 at the time of the survey.

Have serious problems paying medical bills

One in seven older Victorians have serious problems paying medical bills each year – a poor result internationally

Skip recommended medical care because of cost



One in eight older Victorians skip recommended medical care because of cost each year

'Skip recommended medical care' was defined as having skipped seeing a doctor, and/or getting a recommended medical test and/or filling a prescription in the previous 12 months because of cost.

Experience of economic vulnerability and skipped recommended medical care because of cost

One in five older Victorians experiences economic vulnerability each year

And

45% of these people skip recommended medical care because of cost

'Economic vulnerability' was defined as always or usually being stressed or worried about having enough money to buy nutritious meals, paying rent or a mortgage, paying for other monthly bills like electricity, heat, and telephone, or had problems paying medical bills in the previous year. 'Skip recommended medical care' was defined as having skipped seeing a doctor, and/or getting a recommended medical test and/or filling a prescription in the previous 12 months because of cost.

Do not visit a dentist because of cost

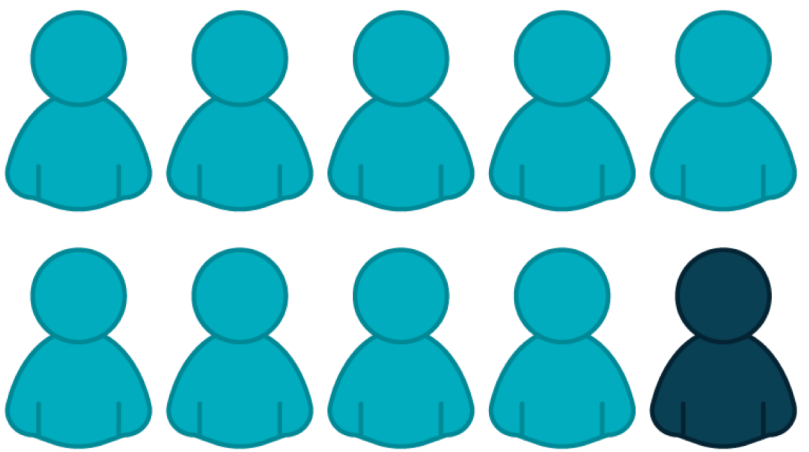
One in four older Victorians do not visit a dentist when required because of cost – a poor result internationally

Economic vulnerability and not seeing a dentist because of cost

Two out of three older Victorians who experience economic vulnerability each year do not visit a dentist when required because of cost

'Economic vulnerability' was defined as always or usually being stressed or worried about having enough money to buy nutritious meals, paying rent or a mortgage, paying for other monthly bills like electricity, heat, and telephone, or had problems paying medical bills in the previous year.

Satisfaction with quality of care

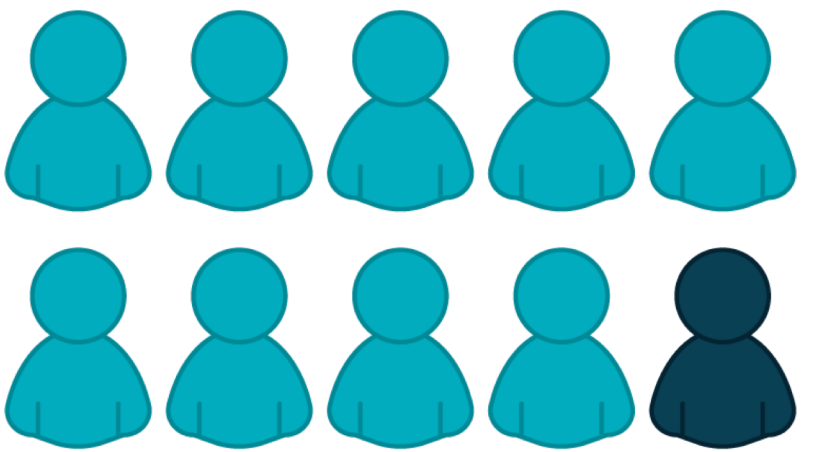


Nine out of 10 older Victorians are satisfied with the quality of care they receive

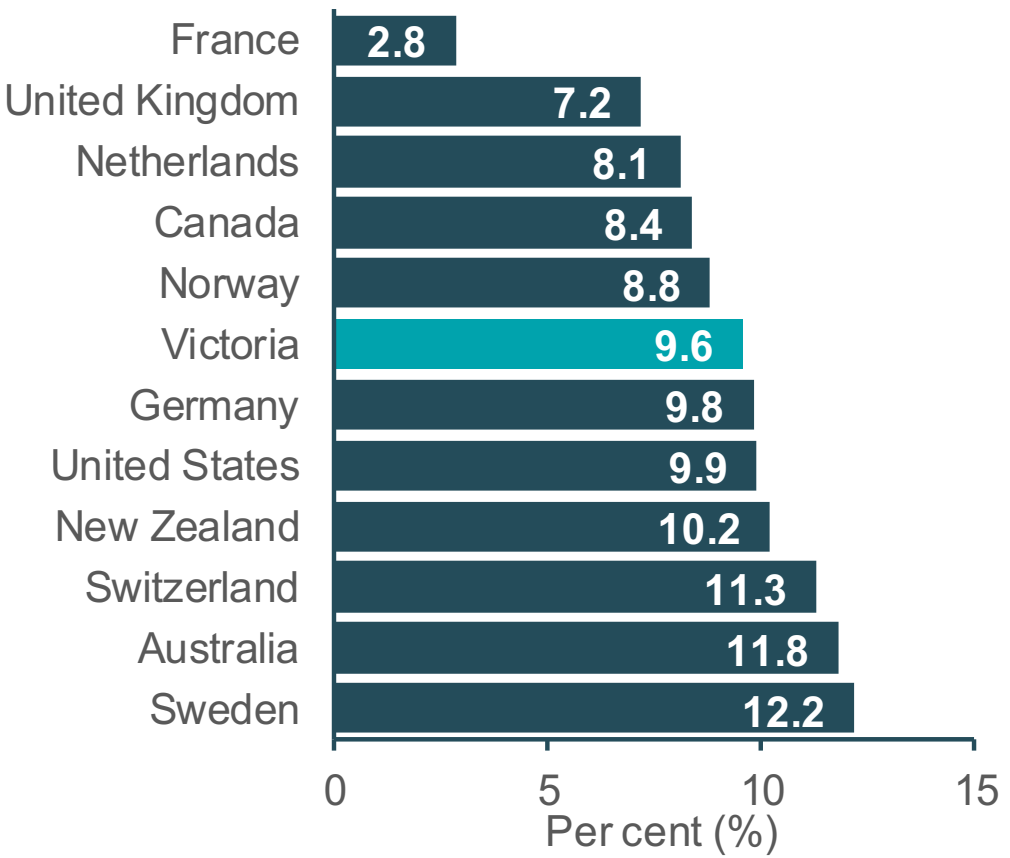
Patient centred-care

Nine out of 10 older Victorians say their regular doctor or medical staff always or often:

- Explain things in a way that is easy to understand
- Involve them in decisions about their care
- Spend enough time with them
- Coordinate their care with other professionals



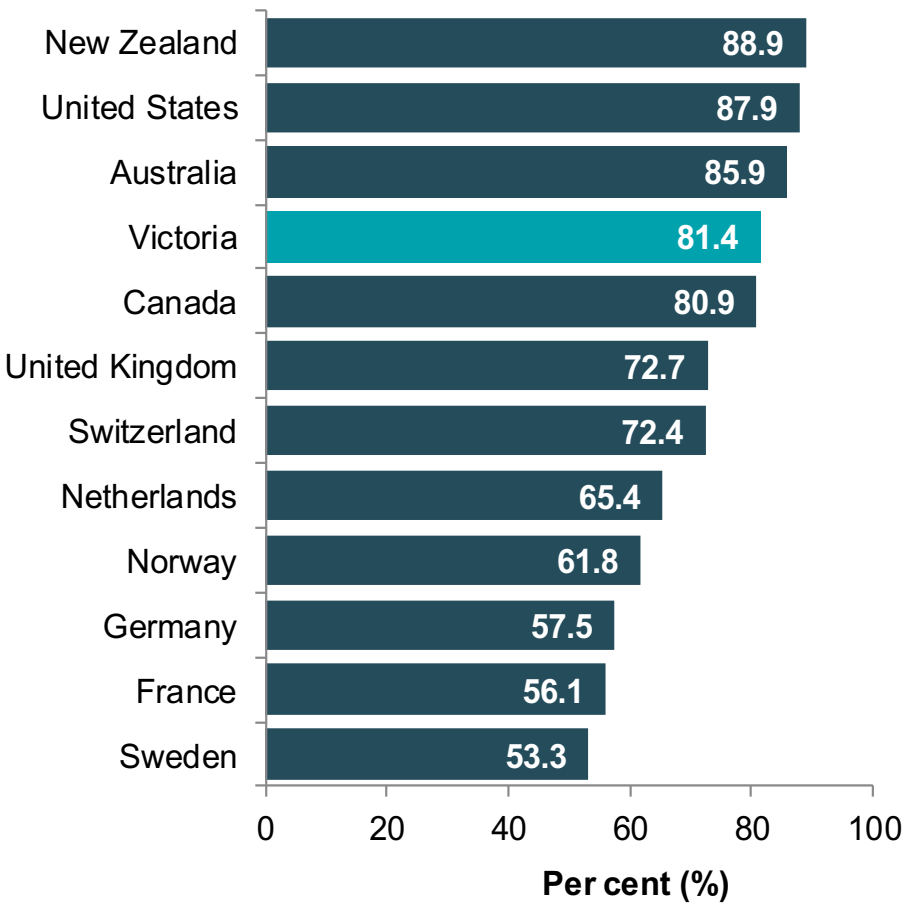
Experience of a medical mistake



One in 10 older Victorians experience a medical mistake in treatment or care over a 2-year period

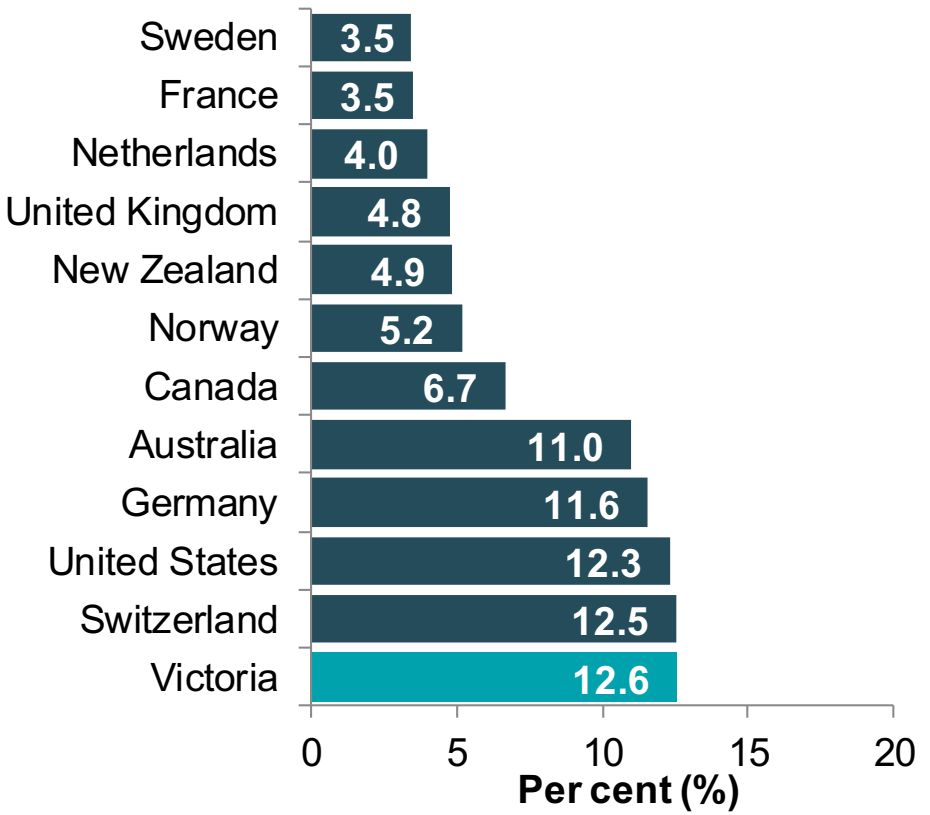
Based on reported experience of a medical mistake in treatment or care in the previous 2 years.

Medication review



Four out of five older Victorians have their medications reviewed by a doctor or pharmacist each year

Duplication of medical tests



One in eight older Victorians experience unnecessary repeat requesting of at least one medical test over a 2-year period

Final word...

The survey results show that most older Victorians fare well, but there are areas where there is room for improvement.

Victoria is well-poised to address areas of concern for older Victorians in the years to come.

Victorian Agency for Health Information

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