

**Briefing**

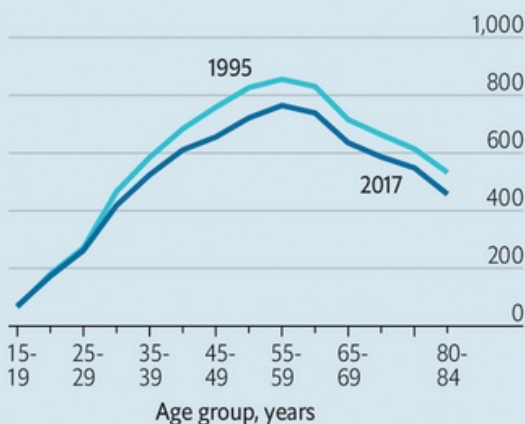
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The burden of back pain

# Back pain is a massive problem which is badly treated

**Lumbaring on**

Global, years lived with disability from low-back pain per 100,000 people



Source: IHME

The Economist

Back pain does not, in and of itself, kill people. But it makes a huge number of lives a misery. In most countries for which there are reliable figures, whether rich or poor, back pain is the top cause of disability, measured by the aggregate number of years lived in poor health. That burden is decreasing (see chart) but only very slowly.

The costs, however, have been rising quite quickly—and are enormous. In 2013, according to one study, \$88bn was spent on medical treatments for back and neck pain in America, not far short of the \$115bn spent on cancer (more recent figures have not been analysed in a comparable way). A great deal of this money seems, sadly, to do little good.