



Time for action on heart disease and stroke

The National Heart Foundation has been commissioned by the Australian Government, to develop a National Strategic Action Plan for Heart and Stroke (the Action Plan), in partnership with the Stroke Foundation. The Action Plan will focus on initiatives that can drive improvement in the key areas of:

- prevention and early detection
- diagnosis and treatment
- support and care
- research

This is welcome news and comes after many years of advocacy for a national plan to better tackle cardiovascular disease and address gaps in the current approach.

While mortality rates from cardiovascular disease continue to decline, heart disease and stroke continue to impose a huge financial and emotional burden on our community. They are responsible for almost 30% of all deaths and 15% of the total disease burden.

In 2017, cardiovascular disease was the underlying cause of 43,500 deaths. Meanwhile, every five minutes an Australian experiences a heart attack or stroke, with more than 100,000 heart attacks and strokes occurring in 2017.

The number of people suffering cardiovascular disease is set to rise over coming years, as the population grows, ages and becomes increasingly overweight and obese. At the same time, risk factors, such as poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, high blood cholesterol and high blood pressure, continue to hover at alarmingly high rates.

We should also be investing more in cardiovascular research and focussing more on strategies to curtail the exceptionally high rates of cardiovascular disease facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A funded and implemented national heart and stroke plan is long over-due.

The Action Plan will focus on improving the quality of life for the 4.2 million Australians living with cardiovascular disease and address strategic priorities for prevention and early detection of those at risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke. Key goals such as reducing avoidable hospital admissions, premature death and decreasing the burden on our hospital system, will help reduce the immense economic and social burden created by cardiovascular disease, which currently costs the nation \$8.8 billion each year.

A steering committee chaired by Prof Emily Banks of the Australian National University (ANU) was convened to guide development of the Action Plan. The steering committee, brings together experts in heart and stroke, including health professionals and consumers, to guide the progression of the Action Plan project.

Extensive consultation has been undertaken, involving people living with or caring for someone living with heart disease or stroke, health professionals, research institutions, peak bodies, all levels of government and other relevant stakeholders, to identify and shape the immediate priorities for action.

An interim report will be provided to the Commonwealth Department of Health at the end of January 2019. A draft plan will be prepared and made available for public consultation, before the final plan is submitted to the Federal Government in April 2019.

The support of all governments - federal, state and territory - will be needed to ensure successful implementation of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan will identify actions that are immediately do-able and achievable, that provide opportunity for states and territories to drive improvements and make gains in addressing key issues around heart and stroke. The Action Plan will address key priorities already identified by governments of all political persuasions: tackling chronic disease, boosting prevention and early detection of those at high risk, reducing preventable hospitalisation and - most importantly - saving lives.

A comprehensive heart and stroke plan will draw policy-makers' attention to the crucial issues impacting the heart health of all Australians and save both lives and money.

To contribute contact the Action Plan Project Manager: heartandstroke@heartfoundation.org.au