



### Why my heart attack patients really need cardiac rehabilitation

As a cardiologist in the western suburbs of Melbourne, every day I see the impact of heart disease on the lives of ordinary people.

Each day I am reminded that heart disease is the leading cause of death in Australia<sup>i</sup>. This equates to, on average, one Australian dying every 28 minutes of heart disease.

Heart disease remains a significant challenge for our health system; more than 620,000 Australians reported having heart disease<sup>ii</sup>.

### Cardiac rehabilitation is the key to the best life

Like all cardiologists, I want my patients to have the best possible life after their cardiac event. I strongly believe that cardiac rehabilitation is a critical step in my patient's journey to better health.

What is cardiac rehabilitation? It is a support program for heart attack survivors that helps them to learn more about: their condition, including managing medications; the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity; the warning signs of a heart attack; and what to do in an emergency.

Guidelines<sup>iii</sup> developed by the National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand indicate that all patients with a diagnosis of Acute Coronary Syndrome (including heart attack) should be referred to a cardiac rehabilitation program.

### We need more heart attack patients to attend cardiac rehabilitation

Unfortunately, rates of referral to cardiac rehabilitation programs aren't as high as we would like them to be and are currently estimated to be around 40%<sup>iv</sup>. Of equal concern is the low attendance and completion rates for these programs. This is particularly concerning as analysis suggests that attendance at cardiac rehabilitation can reduce hospital readmissions<sup>v</sup>.

We need to better understand what's going on in cardiac rehabilitation services; we need to routinely monitor, and report on, cardiac rehabilitation data to get an accurate snapshot of the state of play. This monitoring and reporting will assist in driving service and quality improvements and allow benchmarking with best-practice standards.

People living with heart disease deserve the best care to help them live longer and with better health. Cardiac rehabilitation is integral in supporting heart attack survivors to live well and avoid a repeat event.

This is why I believe cardiac rehabilitation is crucial for my patients, and why I want to work collaboratively with other health professionals, decision-makers and key stakeholders to get this right.

It is, after all, what all our patients deserve.

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<sup>i</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018. *Causes of Death 2017*, ABS cat. no. 3303.0, September.

<sup>ii</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, National Health Survey: First results, 2014-15, ABS cat. no. 4364.0.55.001, March. Data customised using TableBuilder.

<sup>iii</sup>National Heart Foundation of Australia and Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand: Australian Clinical Guidelines for the Management of Acute Coronary Syndromes 2016.

<sup>iv</sup>Heart Foundation, Heart Attack Survivors Survey, 2018..

<sup>v</sup>De Gruyter E, Ford G, Stavreski B. Economic and social impact of increase uptake of cardiac rehabilitation services – a cost benefit analysis. *Heart Lung and Circulation*; 25(2), pp. 175 – 83.