Cardiovascular disease (mostly heart disease and stroke):
• Is the most costly disease group at $7.7 billion a year, or 10.4 percent of direct healthcare expenditure, including $4.5 billion in hospital admissions and $1.65 billion in pharmaceuticals.
• Is highly prevalent, with 4.2 million Australians living with cardiovascular disease.
• Is a major cause of premature death, disability and avoidable hospital admissions.
• Is the underlying cause of 29 percent of deaths in Australia.
• Is 30 percent higher in remote areas for both hospitalisations and deaths.
• Is more prevalent among low socioeconomic groups and in regional areas.
• Is largely preventable.

The facts
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Stroke initiatives

**Detect and manage those at risk**

- The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines for the general public (2018) strongly recommend that all Australians aged 18 years and older should be screened for high risk of stroke.
- The Australian Government has developed a comprehensive action plan to help manage those at risk.
- The plan includes a national stroke audit, which will help ensure more Australians have access to timely and appropriate care.

**Ensure all Australians can recognise the signs of stroke**

- The F.A.S.T. stroke awareness campaign was launched by the Stroke Foundation in 2019.
- The campaign aims to help all Australians recognise the signs of stroke and seek help immediately.
- The F.A.S.T. acronym stands for:
  - Face – check their face. Has their smile gone askew?
  - Arm – can they lift both arms? Is one arm weak?
  - Speech – is their speech slurred? Do they have trouble speaking?
  - Time – Is the symptom worsening over time or does it stay the same?

The campaign aims to reduce the time between the first symptoms of stroke and the administration of thrombolysis. The earlier treatment is given, the better the chance of preserving brain function.

**Shared priorities**

- **Develop Australia’s first heart and stroke strategy**
  - To achieve a seamless heart and stroke care system for all Australians.
  - To reduce the burden of heart and stroke by 20% by 2030.
  - To improve outcomes for people with heart and stroke.
- **Develop a comprehensive action plan**
  - To support all Australians to adopt healthy lifestyle changes.
  - To increase awareness and education of heart and stroke prevention.

**Heart initiatives**

- **Close the gap on rheumatic heart disease**
  - To ensure all Australians have access to timely and appropriate care.
  - To reduce the incidence of rheumatic fever and heart disease.
- **Fund a national cardiac rehabilitation audit**
  - To improve the quality and efficiency of cardiac rehabilitation services.

**Best practice clinical support and education for health professionals**

- To provide ongoing education and support for health professionals.
- To improve the quality of care for people with heart and stroke.

**Ensure every Australian household has someone who knows the signs of stroke and how to call 000**

- To reduce the number of people who do not recognise the signs of stroke.
- To ensure all Australians have access to timely treatment.

**Move More, Sit Less!**

- To encourage all Australians to adopt a more active lifestyle.
- To reduce the burden of chronic disease.

**Help all Australians to Move More, Sit Less!**

- To promote physical activity for all Australians.
- To reduce the incidence of chronic disease.

**Stroke Foundation proposal in focus**

- **F.A.S.T.** (Face, Arm, Speech, Time)
  - A quick and easy way to remember the signs to look for.
  - A simple reminder to seek help immediately.

**Recommended action:**

- Embed newly developed stroke guidelines into daily practice for stroke care.
- Ensure all Australians know the signs of stroke and can call 000 immediately.
- Fund a service to follow up with stroke survivors and support them in their recovery.

**These are the areas where more resources are needed to ensure that all Australians have access to timely and appropriate care for heart and stroke.**

**Dr Lauren Elson, Harvard Medical School**

*“We have a bigger impact on disease risk and chronic conditions than any other strategy that's readily available to us.”*

**Lorraine, Queensland**

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