

A better plan for stroke – investing in health services Tasmanians need

- › **The Tasmanian Government has an opportunity to strengthen its plan for better stroke treatment and support, so more stroke patients survive, avoid disability and recover.**
- › Tasmanians are among Australians at highest risk of stroke.¹ This year alone, Tasmanians will experience more than 1,400 strokes¹, and there are more than 12,000 stroke survivors living in the community¹, most with ongoing disability.
- › Stroke Foundation is proud to be partnering with the Tasmanian Government and Department of Health to address the state's stroke burden.
- › This submission calls for a continuation of the current funding for a further two years, for the delivery of F.A.S.T. Community Education, a Community of Practice to drive better quality stroke treatment, and a stroke survivor out-reach program.
- › Stroke Foundation gratefully acknowledges the ongoing funding received from the Department of Health (\$90,000 per annum), which has enabled us to maintain a local presence in the state, and provide Tasmanian stroke survivors with valuable information and support.
- › The Tasmanian Government's strong investment in boosting access to stroke services and support is delivering results, and the new stroke telemedicine service will take this further.
- › **Together we can build on the solid foundation that has been established, maximising the value of the Government's investment, and delivering a better health plan for all Tasmanians.**

Tasmania Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21



Nic's Story

Tasmanian stroke survivor Nic Stephen (pictured, right) was enjoying a casual night at home with his wife and two children when he started to feel strange. Unsure of what was happening, Nic went to bed hoping to sleep it off. The next morning Nic awoke unable to walk or see out of his left eye. Nic had suffered a stroke, he was 37.

Working full-time and healthy, stroke was the last thing Nic and his family expected. In an instant their lives changed.

Following the stroke Nic's cognitive ability and decision-making skills were impaired. Nic was struggling, and it was difficult for him and his family to understand and address.



“Not knowing what to do, and not knowing what the options were, limited my ability to take control of the rehabilitation that was on offer,” Nic said.

“Stroke Foundation’s Stroke Outreach Program (StOP) is changing that for Tasmanians who experience stroke today, and we are now better able to take care of ourselves. Knowing there are options provides such peace of mind.”

Proposal 1

Continue the F.A.S.T. Community Education Program to reduce stroke and speed up treatment.

Investment: \$60,000 per annum over two years.

Stroke is a time-critical illness and faster diagnosis and treatment saves lives and results in improved quality of life. To deliver a better plan for stroke, we must ensure more Tasmanians recognise a stroke when it occurs, and how vital it is to call an ambulance.

The F.A.S.T. (Face, Arms, Speech, and Time) Community Education Program is delivering results, and not just in its target communities of the Huon Valley and Launceston.

Tasmania has the highest prompted awareness of the signs of stroke in the country: 86 percent of Tasmanians identified facial drooping and speech difficulties as signs of stroke when prompted, while 55 percent identified an inability to lift both arms.²

However, there is still more to be done. Only 36 percent of Tasmanians with stroke are arriving at hospital within the 4.5 hour window for clot-dissolving treatment.³

Continuing Stroke Foundation's F.A.S.T. Community Education Program will strengthen current investments to boost stroke services. It will be delivered in support of the new stroke telemedicine service, targeting vulnerable communities in Hobart and the North West of the state.

What has been achieved:

- › **More than 15,000 F.A.S.T. resources** (bookmarks, wallet cards, fridge magnets and 'Understand and Prevent Stroke' booklets) have been delivered by StrokeSafe volunteers to organisations in the Huon Valley and Launceston, including pharmacies, general practice surgeries, community health centres, workplaces, businesses, local and state government organisations, as well as households.
- › **15 volunteers trained** as StrokeSafe speakers, delivering free education sessions to community groups and workplaces, and attending events in target communities.
- › **60 buses with internal F.A.S.T. advertising, and one F.A.S.T. branded bus, in Launceston**, raising awareness of the signs of stroke in support of National Stroke Week.
- › **In the first half of 2019, a total of 10 F.A.S.T. events were held across the Huon Valley**, including Information sessions and StrokeSafe education events. Based on the results of pre and post questionnaires completed by attendees at

Tasmania Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21



StrokeSafe talks, there was a **36 percent increase in the number of participants who recognised the three F.A.S.T. signs of stroke.**

- Significant local media coverage.
- Partnerships developed with the University of Tasmania, Metro Tasmania, Libraries Tasmania, local workplaces and community groups.

"By partnering with the Stroke Foundation in Huonville, Cygnet and Geeveston, we have increased the health literacy of our Huon Valley communities. The F.A.S.T. pop-up information stands in Huonville Library generated much discussion about the signs of stroke. We look forward to continued engagement with the Stroke Foundation."

David Gutteridge, Huonville Library Manager.



StrokeSafe Volunteer Jenny Day with Huonville Library Manager David Gutteridge

Australia's Biggest Blood Pressure Check

The number of strokes experienced would be almost cut in half (48 percent) if high blood pressure alone was eliminated.⁴

Investment: Additional \$25,000.

More than **108,000** Tasmanians **have high blood pressure**.¹ High blood pressure is the key risk factor for stroke, but with knowledge it is preventable and manageable.

We can reduce the number of preventable strokes experienced by Tasmanians by supporting them to identify and manage their risk of stroke.

Stroke Foundation's Australia's Biggest Blood Pressure Check project, supported by the Tasmanian Government Community Fund, is demonstrating change is possible. There is an opportunity to build on what has been achieved by taking the project to other communities.

In the two months since the project was rolled out in the Launceston community, **more than 700 free digital health checks were provided to residents. A total of 15 percent of participants were identified as having a high risk of stroke.** Residents are now being supported to take measurable actions to reduce their blood pressure and stroke risk.

Proposal 2

Continue StOP (Stroke Outreach Program) – Ensuring stroke survivors and their families are supported to live well after stroke and avoid another stroke.

Investment: \$102,000 per annum over two years.

- › **Four in 10 stroke survivors will experience another stroke within a decade.⁵**
- › **80 percent of strokes can be prevented.⁴**
- › **Around half of Tasmanian stroke survivors are discharged from hospital without vital advice on what they can do to reduce their risk of another stroke.³**

The Tasmanian Government is leading the way in recurrent stroke prevention by partnering with Stroke Foundation to deliver the StOP Program across the state. The first program of its kind, StOP delivers planned, individualised and coordinated education targeted at reducing a survivor's risk of subsequent stroke and repeat hospitalisation. The Program also provides education and support for hospital clinicians to enable them to deliver effective secondary prevention education and planning to every patient, every time.

Stroke Foundation is proposing to extend the current StOP Program for an additional two years. This will build on the important work already done since the Program's establishment in 2018, embedding the Program in hospitals, securing more referrals and benefiting more Tasmanians.

What has been achieved:

- › 11 sites referring to StOP.
- › Almost 100 Tasmanian stroke survivors and their families have benefited from StOP.

A formal, independent evaluation of the Tasmanian StOP Program is currently underway, funded by Stroke Foundation. Results will pave the way for future improvements and expansion of the Program to other states.

Preliminary results have indicated:

- › 17 percent increase in participant knowledge of individual risk factors.
- › 16 percent increase in participant confidence in managing their individual risk factors.
- › 10 percent of participants have been identified as vulnerable or at risk.

- › 22 percent of participants needed care coordination, including referrals to other service providers and outpatient appointments.

Janet's Story

Janet, 50, was referred to the Stroke Foundation's Stroke Outreach Program (StOP) by the local hospital on her discharge home.

A StOP call was made to Janet 14 days after she returned home.

Janet told the StOP health professional she initially thought her stroke was a migraine. Janet had a history of migraines, and was confused and fearful of having another stroke.

The StOP health professional listened to Janet's concerns, and provided education and advice on the management of stroke risk factors and life after stroke. Janet was encouraged to call triple zero (000) immediately if she was unsure or if she noticed stroke signs.

Janet said there was a wait to see the local neurologist, so the StOP health professional talked about other options. Janet was informed about the Stroke Foundation StrokeLine service, where she could access further free advice from health professionals.

The StOP health professional recommended Janet visit her GP for ongoing blood pressure and cholesterol checks. Janet was also provided with local contacts for physiotherapy and exercise physiology, to look at an appropriate exercise regime. All of Janet's upcoming appointments and medications were reviewed and explained.

A summary letter was sent to Janet's GP from StOP.

Proposal 3

Continue a better plan for stroke treatment and care in Tasmania: Community of Practice – StrokeLink.

Investment: \$70,000 per-annum over two years.

Building on the inaugural ‘Community of Practice’ event opened by Minister Courtney in November, we need to strengthen and embed this program. The Community of Practice program supports clinical leaders in stroke to drive quality improvement through shared data, knowledge and best-practice examples. Continuing this program will allow time for improvements in stroke treatment and care to be seen across Tasmania. It will maximise the benefits of the new stroke telemedicine service and the Government’s boost to stroke services.

Stroke Foundation has developed a cost-effective, continuous improvement model that utilises local and national data, expertise and training to empower health professionals to deliver evidence-based stroke care across Tasmania.

What has been achieved:

- › Three major hospitals engaged in audit and feedback.
- › The first facilitated ‘Community of Practice’ change workshop has been held, fostering collaboration between hospitals. Hospitals have agreed on practice gaps and strategies for change, and have developed quality improvement plans.

Next steps:

- › Education and resource sharing.
- › Follow-up on progress and support to overcome challenges.
- › Specific strategies to showcase and share successes across services. This includes annual state-wide stroke forums, bringing together local clinicians and researchers with national and international experts.

A total of **94 percent of health professionals reported greater confidence in identifying practice gaps** after the workshops. The focus now is on addressing these gaps.

Tasmania Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21



The proposals outlined in this submission will continue to support the following priority areas of the Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan:

- ✓ **Smoking**
- ✓ **Healthy eating and physical activity**
- ✓ **Community connections**
- ✓ **Chronic condition screening and management**

In addition to the above, the included proposals will:

- ✓ **Deliver a better plan for health**
- ✓ **Improve health outcomes for all Tasmanians**
- ✓ **Boost the capacity of the health system and support our health professionals**

Tasmania Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21



References

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Tasmania Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21



About the Stroke Foundation

The Stroke Foundation is a national charity that partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting stroke survivors.

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