

Victoria Pre-budget Submission

2026–27

Survivor of stroke, Brianna Covich (right),
her daughter Mahali (centre)
and husband Jonathan.





Survivors of stroke, Shannon Nelson (left), Brooke Parsons (middle) and fundraiser Dan Maitland.

Stroke Foundation is the voice of stroke in Australia, working to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery

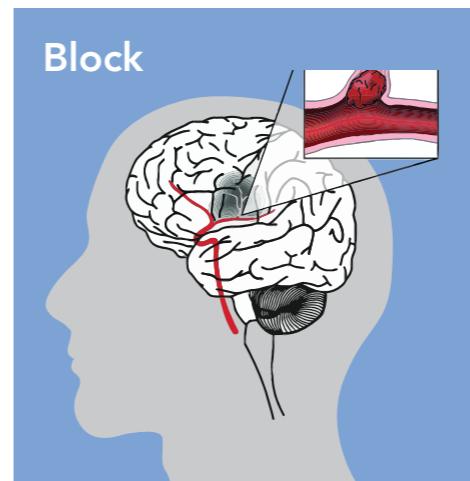
We partner with survivors of stroke, carers, health professionals, government and the community to reduce the incidence and impact of stroke for all Australians.

Stroke Foundation is the leading national organisation in Australia focused on stroke prevention, treatment and recovery.

For 30 years, we have championed breakthrough stroke research, successfully advocated for access to innovative treatments, increased public awareness in stroke prevention and recognition, and educated thousands of health professionals to deliver best-practice care.

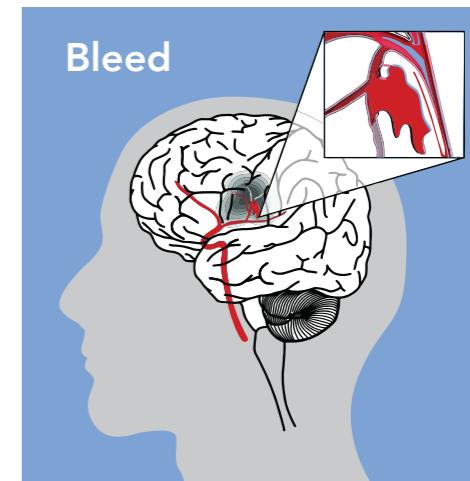
Every achievement takes a united team of stroke champions working together with a single voice and purpose: survivors of stroke with their families and carers, health professionals, researchers, volunteers, advocacy bodies, generous donors, corporate Australia, government and philanthropic partners.

What is a stroke?



Ischaemic stroke

(Blood clot or plaque blocks artery)



Haemorrhagic stroke

(Artery breaks or bursts)

Stroke can strike **anyone**, at **any time**.

A stroke happens when blood supply to the brain is interrupted.

When this happens, brain cells do not get enough oxygen or nutrients and they immediately begin to die.

Stroke is always a medical emergency.

Importantly, we know that more than **80 percent of strokes can be prevented**.

The state of stroke in Victoria – why we have to act now

In 2023, there were 11,519 stroke events in Victoria,¹ and many of those survivors of stroke will be living with an ongoing disability. There are more than 110,000 survivors of stroke living in Victoria¹ – and their number is growing.

One of the key modifiable risk factors for stroke is high blood pressure. Importantly, 1,261,100 Victorians are living with high blood pressure,¹ and many don't know it. In addition, 563,500 Victorians are daily smokers and 564,800 have high cholesterol¹ – putting them at an increased risk of stroke.

Why is this happening?

Our population is growing and ageing. We are living longer, more sedentary lives. Our physical and social environments are influencing lifestyle choices and behaviours, putting us at an increased risk of stroke, and at a younger age.

At the same time, there is a clear lack of community knowledge and awareness about the common stroke risk factors, the typical signs of stroke when it happens, and the fact that stroke is a medical emergency and calling an ambulance immediately at the first sign of stroke is critical.

Our health system is also struggling to meet the needs of patients with stroke. Improvements have been made in the delivery of acute stroke treatment and care; however, time-critical treatment and best-practice care is not available to all Victorian patients. In addition, we know that for many survivors of stroke, their rehabilitation needs are not assessed and those who need rehabilitation do not always receive it. This in turn increases the impact on informal carers and social care services.

It doesn't have to be this way

Stroke can often be prevented and it can be treated. We are making progress, but there is much more to be done.

We are taking action, but we can't do this alone. It takes everyone's support, from government right through to individuals, to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery from stroke for all Victorians.

We have an opportunity to act, to reduce the impact of stroke on survivors, their families and carers, the community, and the healthcare system. We can and must act for the health and wellbeing of future generations.

We urgently need the support of the Victorian government. Our programs and services are in greater demand than ever before, because the health system, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the aged care system are not adequately meeting the needs of the community.

In 2023, the lifetime healthcare costs to government associated with strokes that occurred in Victoria were \$1.4 billion, including \$1.1 billion in hospital costs.¹ Therefore, the economic benefit of Victorian Government investment in initiatives to reduce the impact of stroke are clear.

Victorian Government investment in stroke management procedures, protocols and infrastructure is delivering results. Most recently, State Government investment in the *Enhancing Stroke Care* project, one of 13 improvement projects delivered as part of Safer Care Victoria's 100,000 Lives program, has delivered meaningful improvements in stroke treatment and care across Victoria.² **In just 6 months, this project has reduced the time to treatment for Victorian stroke patients²:**

- the time it takes from a patient arriving at hospital to receiving a scan has been **reduced by 6 minutes**, due to better pre-notification and handover processes
- the time it takes from a patient arriving at hospital to receiving thrombolysis (clot-dissolving) treatment has been **reduced by 7 minutes, saving an estimated 483 disability days**
- the time it takes from a patient arriving at hospital to receiving endovascular clot retrieval treatment has been **reduced by 11 minutes, saving an estimated 803 disability days**.

This project is supporting Victorian hospitals and clinicians in their efforts to progress towards the 30/60/90 National Stroke Targets, a group of metrics designed to drive quality improvement in the areas of stroke unit access and time-critical stroke treatments, which have been endorsed by the Victorian Government.

Importantly, it is ensuring more Victorians have the opportunity to recover, regain independence, and return to their everyday lives.

The funding proposals in this submission will:

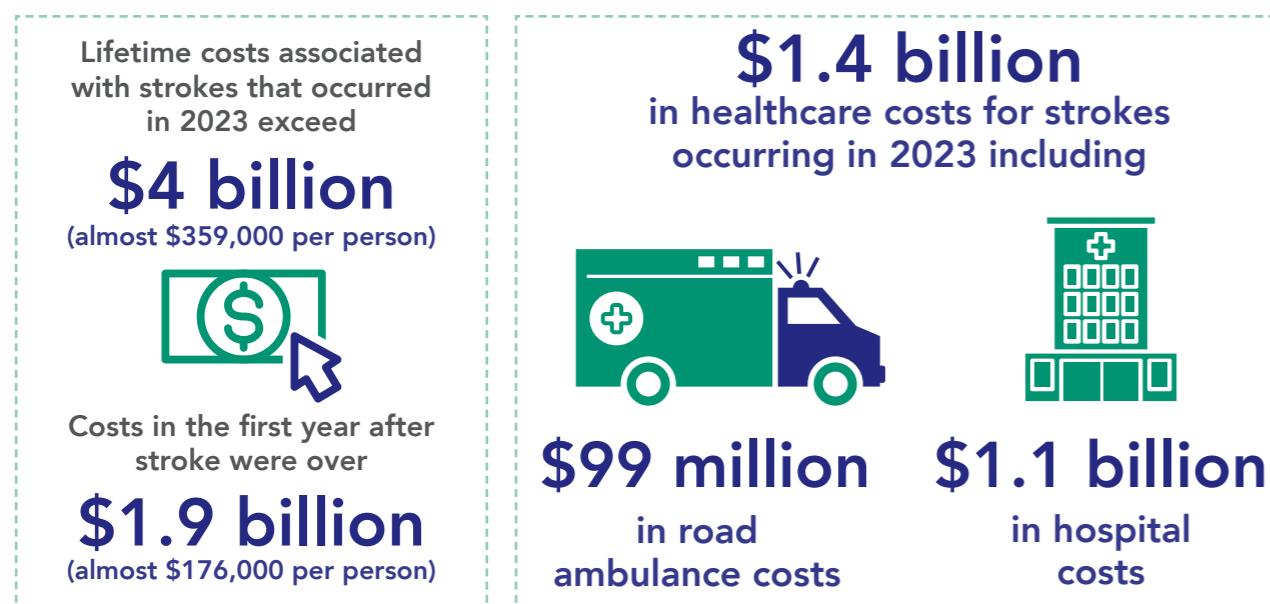
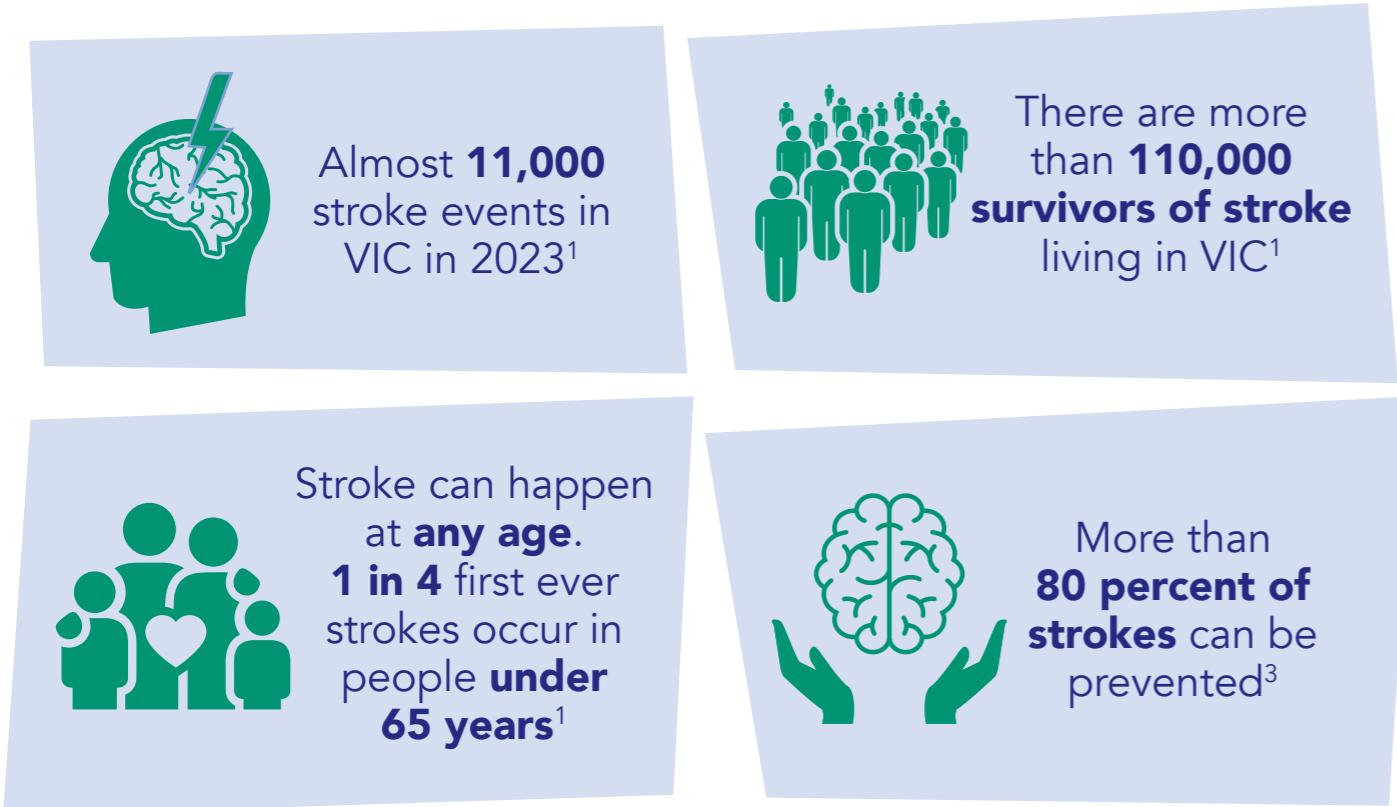
- maximise the State Government's investment in the Victorian Stroke Telemedicine Service, ensuring residents in regional communities covered by the Service know the signs of stroke, and the importance of calling 000 (triple zero) immediately
- ensure Victorians who receive excellent stroke treatment and care in hospital are able to access the information they need in a timely manner, and are supported in their transition from hospital to home and onto recovery.

Now is the time for action and investment to change the landscape of stroke prevention, treatment and recovery in Victoria.



Survivor of stroke, Stewart Greig.

The hard facts



Summary of Stroke Foundation proposals

Stroke Foundation is seeking Victorian Government investment in our proven, highly effective and evidence-based programs and resources, in order to meet the urgent needs of survivors of stroke, their families and carers.

1. F.A.S.T. (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) Community Engagement Program

Investment: \$3.5 million (\$880,000 per year over four years).

Ensure more Victorians know how to recognise the signs of stroke and how vital it is to call 000 (triple zero) immediately, regardless of where they live.

2. Enhanced support for stroke recovery: *My Stroke Journey* for every Victorian survivor of stroke

Investment: \$388,000 (\$97,000 per year over four years).

Ensure more Victorians who are impacted by stroke are able to access the information they need in a timely manner, supporting the transition from hospital to home and on to recovery, and reducing the risk of recurrent stroke.

3. Support for the Young Stroke Service

Ensure the sustainability of the Young Stroke Service (YSS), Australia's first health service dedicated to helping young survivors of stroke aged 18 to 55, which is operating in Victoria. YSS is working with young Victorians who have had a stroke, as well as their supporters and health professionals, providing them with the information, support and services they need as they navigate life after stroke.

Proposal 1: F.A.S.T. (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) Community Engagement Program

Investment: \$3.5 million (\$880,000 per year over four years).

Investment in a F.A.S.T. Community Engagement Program will:

- › mobilise communities through a grassroots engagement program focused on stroke 'hotspot' regions and priority populations at higher risk of stroke
- › drive public awareness and inspire action through a mainstream media campaign, emphasising the F.A.S.T. message through stories told by people impacted by stroke
- › result in an increase in the awareness of the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke in the Victorian community, earlier engagement of ambulance services and quicker presentation to hospital
- › increase the unprompted awareness of at least one F.A.S.T. sign of stroke in Victoria from 66 percent to 76 percent.

Stroke is a medical emergency. When someone has a stroke, every minute counts. **Faster diagnosis and treatment saves lives and reduces disability.**

In 2023, the lifetime healthcare costs to government associated with strokes that occurred in Victoria were \$1.4 billion, including \$1.1 billion in hospital costs.¹ **Prompt access to stroke treatment means decreased costs for our health and disability systems.**

The F.A.S.T. message highlights the three most common ways to recognise a stroke (Face, Arms and Speech), and reminds us that Time is critical when seeking treatment.

The 2025 Stroke Foundation F.A.S.T. Signs and Stroke Awareness Survey reported on the unprompted awareness of the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke in the Australian community, and showed that one in three Victorians are unable to name any of the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke (34 percent).⁴ Only 12 percent of Victorians are aware of all three signs of stroke⁴ (up from 7 percent in 2023).⁵

It is critical Victorians understand that if they or someone they know experience the signs of stroke, they must call 000 (triple zero) immediately. The Victorian Stroke Telemedicine Service is ensuring those in regional areas of the state have 24/7 access to stroke specialists, so it is essential they know the F.A.S.T. message.

 **1 in 3**
Victorians are unable to name any **F.A.S.T. signs of stroke**⁴

 **Only 12 percent** of Victorians are aware of all **3 F.A.S.T. signs of stroke**⁴

 **Only 36 percent** of Victorian stroke patients arrive at hospital within the recommended 4.5 hour window for **clot-dissolving treatment**⁶

The program

Importantly, we know that major gains in population awareness of the F.A.S.T. message can be made over time. F.A.S.T. advertising campaigns are proven to increase awareness of the signs of stroke, and calls to emergency services, nationally⁷ and internationally,^{8,9} and support well established scientific findings that significant and continuous exposure to public health messages over several years leads to gradual improvement in population awareness and knowledge.

Therefore, **Stroke Foundation is calling on the Victorian Government to invest in a F.A.S.T. Community Engagement Program.**

We will **engage and partner with existing community groups, services and stakeholders to share the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke.** A network of local volunteers and stroke champions, many with lived experience of stroke, will be recruited, trained and supported to deliver the program. Activities will include **StrokeSafe community presentations, workplace engagement and targeted events.** These local champions will lead grassroots engagement to creatively raise awareness of the signs of stroke and stroke prevention strategies.

A **state-wide, integrated multi-channel advertising campaign** will amplify the F.A.S.T. message across TV, radio, outdoor, digital and social media channels. This will be complemented by a **mainstream media campaign** featuring stories of survivors of stroke, and calls to action encouraging residents and workplaces to actively support the campaign.

This program will **target stroke 'hotspot' areas** across Victoria, including Victorian Stroke Telestroke Service catchment areas and other high need locations, as well as

priority populations at higher risk of stroke, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and regional, rural and remote communities.

We are calling on the Victorian Government to invest in a F.A.S.T. Community Engagement Program to increase the number of Victorians who know what stroke is, how to reduce stroke risk, how to recognise a stroke when it occurs, and how vital it is to call 000 (triple zero) immediately. This program will ensure life-saving information on stroke reaches more Victorians and will deliver economic benefits for our health and disability systems.

Learn the F.A.S.T. signs of STROKE

 **FACE**
drooped?

 **ARMS**
can't be raised?

 **SPEECH**
slurred or confused?

 **TIME**
is critical! Call 000.

If you see any of these signs
Act FAST call 000 (triple zero)



Case study 1

F.A.S.T. in action: Beth's story

Beth Browning was just 19 when she had a stroke in 2019.

"I was lying in my bed and started to feel dizzy. I tried to type something on my phone, but couldn't. I went downstairs to tell my parents, but when I tried to speak, I couldn't get the words out," said Beth.

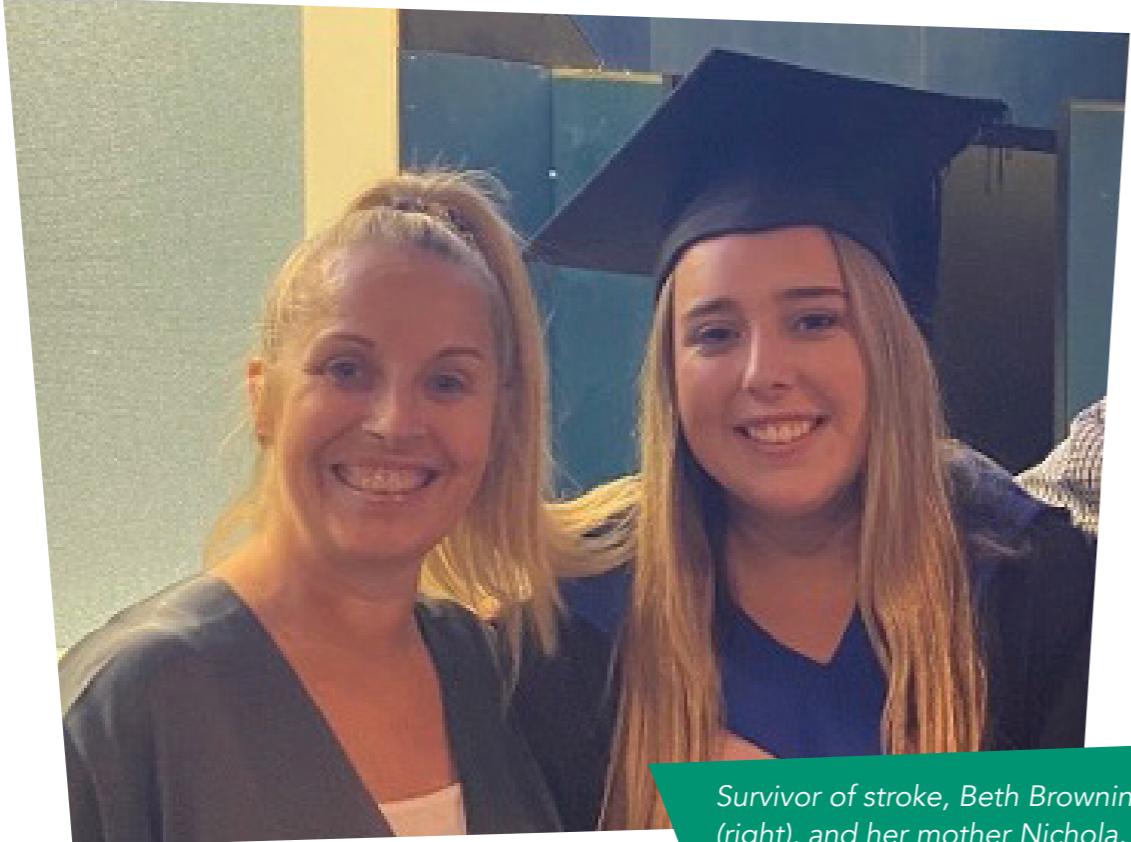
Fortunately, she was a nursing student, and her mother was a nurse, and they were both quick to recognise the signs of stroke.

Beth was rushed to the hospital, where she underwent CT and MRI scans that confirmed she was having a stroke.

Twelve hours after her stroke, Beth's speech began to recover, and she started to feel better.

Beth has no permanent cognitive deficits or motor skill impairment as a result of her stroke, and she has made an excellent recovery; however, she still battles fatigue and headaches.

"I do consider myself extremely lucky. I think it's really important to raise community awareness about the signs of stroke, and the fact that stroke can affect anyone, young or old."



Survivor of stroke, Beth Browning (right), and her mother Nichola.

Survivor of childhood stroke, Tommy Quick.



Proposal 2: Enhanced support for stroke recovery – *My Stroke Journey* for every Victorian survivor of stroke

Investment: \$388,000 (\$97,000 per year over four years).

Investment in enhanced support for stroke recovery in Victoria will ensure:

- › we can make *My Stroke Journey* free of charge to Victorian hospitals, removing barriers to delivery
- › we can provide education and practical support to Victorian hospitals to ensure every survivor of stroke receives a copy of *My Stroke Journey* that is in the language and medium of their choice, and is culturally appropriate
- › every survivor of stroke discharged from a Victorian hospital receives a copy of *My Stroke Journey*, supporting the transition from hospital to home and on to recovery
- › all Victorian survivors of stroke, families and carers have the information they need to take their place at the centre of their care, look after their health, reduce their risk of another stroke and live a good life after stroke.

We need to enhance support for stroke recovery to better meet the needs of our community.

Survivors of stroke, their families, friends and carers, need access to ongoing information as they navigate life after stroke.

People are at higher risk of stroke after their first stroke. Four in 10 survivors of stroke will go on to have another stroke,¹⁰ and recurrent stroke is more likely to be fatal or cause major disability.¹¹

Survivors of stroke need information and education about stroke risk factors, and strategies, including behaviour modification and blood pressure-lowering, lipid-lowering and antithrombotic or anticoagulation medications, that can reduce their risk of recurrent stroke.

The *Living Guidelines for Stroke Management* recommend that all survivors of stroke and their families and carers should be offered information tailored to meet their individual needs, using relevant language and communication formats. Despite this, the most recent Stroke Foundation National Stroke Audits show that only 62 percent

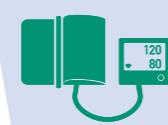
of acute patients⁶ and 61 percent of rehabilitation patients¹² received this information.



94 percent of those who receive *My Stroke Journey* find it useful



Over **75 percent** of those who receive *My Stroke Journey* refer to it after going home



The proportion of survivors who receive advice on stroke risk factors at discharge, has increased by **20 percent** as a result of *My Stroke Journey*



The proportion of survivors who receive advice on secondary stroke prevention and recovery at discharge, has increased by **13 percent** as a result of *My Stroke Journey*

What will enhanced support for stroke recovery in Victoria deliver?

Stroke Foundation's *My Stroke Journey* is a resource delivered by our hospital partners in the first few days after a person's stroke, which is used throughout their admission in education and care planning. This free resource also supports the transition from hospital to the community, and includes information on preparing for discharge and available supports and services.

My Stroke Journey is now a suite of resources, with versions available in both standard and easy English, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Hindi, Korean, Vietnamese and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and parents and carers of children who have had a stroke. The *My Stroke Journey* suite is complemented by other resources, including the *Aphasia Handbook*.

Importantly, we know that many of the people who need this valuable resource the most are not receiving it.

Hospital health professionals have told us that health service expenditure approval processes greatly increase the time it takes to order *My Stroke Journey*. This can lead to delays in ordering, or orders not being made, meaning patients don't receive the stroke information they need.

We will identify and directly engage with Victorian hospitals that are not delivering *My Stroke Journey*.

Educational and practical support will be provided to these hospitals to ensure every survivor of stroke discharged from hospital in Victoria receives a copy of *My Stroke Journey* that is in the language and medium of their choice, and is culturally appropriate.

By removing barriers to the delivery of this resource, more Victorian survivors of stroke will be supported to transition from hospital to home and on to recovery, and have the information they need to look after their health, reduce their risk of another stroke and live a good life after stroke.

We are calling on the Victorian Government to invest in enhanced support for stroke recovery, which will ensure every survivor of stroke discharged from hospital in Victoria receives a copy of *My Stroke Journey*. This will mean more Victorians who are impacted by stroke are able to access the information they need in a timely manner, which will have benefits for survivors of stroke, their families and carers, and our community, as well as our state's health system and economy.



Proposal 3: Support for the Young Stroke Service

Stroke can happen at any age. It was estimated that in 2023, 1 in 4 (25 percent) of those who had a first-ever stroke in Australia were under the age of 65 years.¹

We still don't fully understand why young people have strokes or how to best support them as they recover. Right now, most services are not made for young people, and 88 percent of young survivors of stroke say they don't get the help they need.

The Young Stroke Service (YSS) is Australia's first health service dedicated to helping young survivors of stroke aged 18 to 55. YSS works with young Victorians who have had a stroke, as well as their families, carers and health professionals, and offers a range of supports to help them in their recovery, including:

- › tests and therapy to help with memory and emotions
- › support to help with returning to work and returning to driving
- › information on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- › trustworthy information about stroke and stroke recovery.

Staff from the YSS team work with young survivors of stroke to review their goals with them and develop a plan to address their needs. This may involve more assessments, referrals to other services or treatment from within the YSS.

Services are available in-person or via telehealth. Survivors who have difficulty with communication and thinking are given support to take part in the service.

Importantly, while we know a lot about stroke in young people, there is still more to learn.

Unfortunately, doctors often misdiagnose strokes in people aged 18 to 55, and young survivors of stroke say health services do not always cater to their needs.

YSS connects survivors of stroke, their families, carers and clinicians with researchers. More research will help us understand the cause and lifelong effects of stroke, and can then help improve health services.

YSS is funded by a 2020 MRFF Rapid Applied Research Translation Grant until December 2026. Sustainable funding for this ground-breaking service must be secured, to ensure young Victorians impacted by stroke, and their supporters and health professionals, continue to receive the information, support and services they need.

We are calling on the Victorian Government to invest in the Young Stroke Service, which will ensure more young Victorian survivors of stroke are supported to manage their stroke recovery, achieve better outcomes, return to work (where possible), and resume social and community participation.

Case study 2 Young Stroke Service in action: Ida's story

Ten days after giving birth to her second child, Ida Laino had a stroke at 38 years old.

At first, Ida experienced an excruciating migraine, feeling like her head was about to explode.

She visited three different hospital emergency departments, and her pain was repeatedly downplayed as she showed no obvious signs of a stroke. It was when she started forgetting basic information that a brain scan was done and the doctors realised something was wrong.

"Faces became unrecognisable – I mistook my mother for my aunt – and my vision grew blurry. My short-term memory was gone; I couldn't even remember having a second child," Ida recalled.

The doctors discovered a bleed in her brain, prompting emergency surgery to be performed.

"I felt shocked and overwhelmed, especially given my age... Everything seemed fine, and then suddenly it wasn't. It was incredibly hard to process."

As a new mum, Ida's journey to recovery was particularly daunting. She recalled the need to go back to basics and learn how to read and spell again, while caring for a newborn and a toddler.

"It broke my heart knowing that potentially with my recovery, I may not be able to read to my children ever again, or something as simple as going to a cafe and reading the menu."

Part of Ida's post-stroke reality is that she still cannot drive due to losing her peripheral vision and experiencing visual seizures. She also believes there needs to be greater awareness of the invisible difficulties that young survivors of stroke often endure.

In Ida's case, this included cognitive defects, fatigue, and anxiety.

"Something as simple as writing a shopping list used to take me five minutes. The first time I tried to do it after the stroke, it took me an entire day. By the time I worked out what I was going to cook, what ingredients I needed, and then managed to write the words, the whole day was gone."

Despite having a strong personal support system, Ida felt frustrated by the lack of assistance from health, government, and private services simply because of her age.

"If I had been of retirement age, there likely would have been systems in place to support me. But in my case, no one seemed equipped to handle my situation. My concerns were often dismissed, based on the assumption that someone my age would eventually bounce back – which unfortunately isn't always true," she said.

"That's great in hindsight, but how am I going to bounce back? Who's helping me? In the interim, I needed the support."

Ida first heard about the Young Stroke Service from her rehab team at St Vincent's Hospital, who encouraged her to give it a try.

"It was such a relief to have the support and care of an organisation specifically tailored for young survivors of stroke," she said.

"My experience with the Young Stroke Service has been truly life-changing. They've given me practical strategies and tailored support that have become an essential part of my daily routine, helping me feel fully prepared to face any challenge that comes my way."

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Stroke Foundation | advocacy@strokefoundation.org.au | strokefoundation.org.au

National Office: Level 7, 461 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

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ABN 42 006 173 379