

A better plan for stroke prevention, treatment and care in regional WA

- › **The Government of Western Australia (WA) has an opportunity to boost stroke prevention and treatment in our state's regions, strengthening moves towards a healthy WA.**
- › This year alone, Western Australians will experience more than 5,000 strokes¹ and many of these will be experienced by people living in regional areas of our state.
- › Regional Australians are 19 percent more likely to suffer a stroke than those in metropolitan areas.¹ Regional Australians are also more likely to die or be left with an ongoing disability as a result of stroke, because of limited access to treatments.
- › It doesn't need to be this way. Most strokes can be prevented, stroke can be treated, and it can be beaten.
- › Stroke Foundation is proud to be partnering with the Western Australian Government to deliver F.A.S.T. Community Education in the greater Perth metropolitan region.
- › This program is delivering results, and it is now time we expand on this established program, targeting our state's regions.
- › The expansion of the program will build on the Government's commitment and sustained focus on preventative health. It will also help ensure those who experience a stroke get to hospital quickly, maximising the investment in the WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service.
- › The expansion of F.A.S.T. Community Education into regional WA will bring about positive, sustained change, improving health outcomes for all. Along-side the WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service, it will help break down barriers, leading to better access to health services for stroke patients, and empowering consumers to avoid stroke and other chronic diseases.

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Steve's Story

Western Australian stroke survivor Steve Reid (pictured (middle) below), was working for a mining company in outback WA when he had his stroke. Steve was sitting at home with his brother and felt numbness and tingling in his right hand. After about an hour he stood up and felt so dizzy he almost fell over. Steve had an extreme headache, and took himself to bed, thinking he was coming down with a cold.

When he got up the following morning, Steve still had a headache, and the numbness now stretched down the whole right side of his body. Despite this, Steve went into work.

Steve's symptoms did not improve, and he called his sister, who drove him to the GP. His doctor discovered he had an irregular heart beat and very high blood pressure, and called ahead to the hospital, to let them know Steve was on his way with a suspected stroke.

After his stroke was diagnosed at the hospital in Kalgoorlie, the Royal Flying Doctor Service transported Steve to Perth for treatment.

Steve faced many issues following his stroke. His hand writing had returned to a kindergarten level, and he couldn't mow the lawn because of the vibration of the mower. Everyday tasks such as cooking and housework became difficult, and fatigue hit Steve hard. Steve's short-term memory was affected.

"Four years on I have made a good recovery and am back at work. I know how lucky I am. People find it difficult to believe I have had a stroke, but I want the community to understand every stroke is different. Please remember to have a regular check up with your GP and understand the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke. It could save a life – possibly your own."



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Proposal 1

Expand F.A.S.T. (Face, Arms, Speech and Time) Community Education into regional WA to reduce stroke and speed up treatment.

Investment: Additional \$30,000 per annum over two years.

Stroke is devastating our regional communities. Yet it can be prevented, and it can be treated. F.A.S.T. Community Education is proven to deliver results, now we must take it to regional WA to improve health outcomes for all.

F.A.S.T. Community Education within Perth is delivering results, and more Western Australians are aware of stroke, its risk factors and signs. Research shows 74 percent of Western Australians understand high blood pressure is a key risk factor for stroke, 80 percent (when prompted) identified facial drooping and speech difficulties as signs of stroke, and 63 percent identified an inability to lift both arms as a sign.²

However, there is still more to be done:

- › **15 percent of Western Australians are living with high blood pressure.**³ Of those, 64 percent are not taking medication to manage it.³
- › **68 percent of stroke patients are still arriving at hospital outside of the window for clot-dissolving treatment** (4.5 hours from symptom onset).⁴

Expanding Stroke Foundation's F.A.S.T. Community Education Program will strengthen current investments to boost public health and stroke services. It will be delivered in support of the WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service, targeting our regional communities.

What has been achieved by F.A.S.T. Community Education since it commenced in Perth in 2018:

- › **86 community education sessions** reaching 2400 people.
- › **64 percent of community education sessions** targeted populations at higher risk of stroke.
- › **13 displays** at community events.
- › **2 community forums.**

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- › Significant local media coverage.
- › Partnerships developed with Rotary Clubs, Universities, Local Governments, Bunnings, St John Ambulance and community centres.



Stroke Foundation Community Education Project Officer Helena Johnstone with WA StrokeSafe volunteer Bruce at a Seniors Expo in Rockingham, WA.

Expanding the current program

To date, most of the achievements of the program (including volunteer recruitment and training) have been in metropolitan WA, and on the fringes of the metropolitan area. In mid-2019, two volunteers were recruited and trained in the south-west of the State, and a small number of education sessions have been delivered. Community engagement is now underway in the south-west.

St John Ambulance (SJA) has also shown interest in being involved in the program, due to their involvement in the WA Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service, and it would be of benefit to work more collaboratively with them and their established networks in the regions.

Expressions of interest to be actively involved in the program have also come from the wheat-belt region. To date, we have two volunteers and others awaiting training early in 2020.

The extended program activities and increased budget will allow for the following:

- › Recruitment and training of volunteers in the south-west, great southern and wheat-belt areas of the state.

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- › Provision of volunteer support in the regions.
- › Aligning with the recruitment and training of volunteers, identify 'local champions' and increase community engagement in these areas, to identify opportunities for education sessions and attendance at key community events.
- › Increased local media opportunities to raise awareness and encourage participation by communities in National Stroke Week activities.
- › Build relationships with local stakeholders and primary care organisations and seek opportunities with local health professionals to carry out health checks and encourage consumers to visit their GP for 'Heart Health Checks'.

Estimated indicative budget for the proposed expansion of activities

Salaries and administration	\$17,000 (additional resourcing)
Training, resources	\$5,000
Travel, volunteer reimbursements and support	\$8,000
Total	\$30,000

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Strengthening emergency stroke treatment in our regions

The WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service is saving lives and improving outcomes for many Western Australians living in regional and rural areas. In order to ensure the potential of this significant investment is realised, it must be accompanied by education on stroke awareness and the signs of stroke.

The first step in ensuring improved access to high quality health services for all is ensuring the signs of stroke are recognised and an ambulance called.

When stroke strikes it attacks 1.9 million brain cells per minute.⁵ Time saved in accessing treatment is brain saved.

We must empower our regional communities to act to stop stroke.

Stroke Foundation has established partnerships with St John Ambulance in Bunbury and the Wheatbelt, laying a solid foundation. Expanding F.A.S.T. Community Education into regional WA will save lives.

“St John Ambulance South West are excited to partner with Stroke Foundation in engaging with the community to promote the early recognition of the signs of stroke.”

St John Ambulance South West, WA



Stroke Foundation WA State Manager Jonine Collins, with St John Ambulance staff in Bunbury, WA.

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Proposal 2

Fully fund the Western Australia State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service.

We know the WA Government is committed to increasing the uptake of telehealth in the State, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities which are most likely to benefit from these services.

Stroke Foundation strongly supports the operationalisation of the WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service, by expanding it to provide comprehensive, 24/7 access to stroke specialist consultations for identified WACHS healthcare sites. This will save lives, strengthen our health system, better support our hard-working health professionals and deliver savings to the health budget.

Proven success

Major achievements of the pilot TeleStroke Service to date include:

- › **Increase from one patient receiving clot-busting treatment in 2016-17 to nine in 2017-18.**
- › **Increase in stroke neurologist emergency department consultations from 13 percent in 2015-16 (Q3) to 65 percent in 2018-18 (Q3).**
- › **Patients receiving clot removal treatment increased from nine in 2015-16 to twenty six in 2017-18.**
- › **Dramatic improvements in clinical outcomes and reduced disability** for patients receiving time-critical treatment, **facilitated by WA metro-rural acute stroke pathways.**⁶
- › **Reduced healthcare costs** associated with reduced stroke-related disability.⁶
- › **Increased workforce competence**, with an increase in the confidence of country clinicians in dealing with complex neurological conditions.⁶
- › **Improved patient experience and satisfaction.**⁶

The WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 TeleStroke Service is improving the quality and equity of access to acute stroke care closer to home for regional Western Australians. Fully funding this Service will ensure more Western Australians living in the regions benefit from it, reducing the economic burden of stroke in WA.

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Kate's Story⁷

The WA State-wide Consultant Led 24/7 Telestroke Service played a critical role in Bunbury senior Kate Hadrill's stroke recovery.

Kate's memory of the day she suffered a stroke is quite hazy. The only things she does remember are falling twice while making the bed, and being transported to Perth in a helicopter.

Bunbury Regional Hospital, once informed of Kate's suspected stroke by ambulance officers, had an Emergency Department doctor on standby to use the hospital's portable wireless videoconferencing telecart to call a neurologist at Perth's Fiona Stanley Hospital (FSH).

From his desk at FSH, the stroke specialist was able to examine Kate via the telecart, observing her speech loss and facial droop on the right side. Following conversations with Kate's husband Ivan, and her treating doctor at Bunbury Regional Hospital, the stroke specialist recommended a course of action.

Kate was immediately transported by helicopter to the Neurological Intervention and Imaging Service of WA (NIISWA) unit at FSH, and underwent a clot removal treatment procedure four hours later.

A few days after her surgery, Kate was transferred back to Bunbury Regional Hospital. After two weeks of high intensity stroke rehabilitation, including physiotherapy and speech and occupational therapy, she was able to return home.

Kate's doctor at Bunbury Regional Hospital stated that had the clot not been removed so quickly, she may not have had such a positive outcome.

It is clear Kate understands how fortunate it was that doctors at Bunbury Hospital had access to the life-saving telestroke service, and the expertise of a stroke specialist, which made such an important difference to her recovery.

"I wouldn't be as good as I am today, I'm sure of that", she said.

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The proposals outlined in this submission align with the following recommendations of the WA Sustainable Health Review:

- ✓ Commit and collaborate to address major public health issues.
- ✓ Person-centred equitable, seamless access.
- ✓ Drive safety, quality and value through transparency, funding and planning.
- ✓ Invest in digital healthcare and use data wisely.
- ✓ Culture and workforce to support new models of care.
- ✓ Innovate for sustainability.

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References

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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.

Stroke Foundation established its Western Australian presence in 2008. The Stroke Foundation's work builds on the services and support provided by WA Health, hospitals and health professionals.

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