

Don't let stroke be your first warning: Australians urged to check heartbeat

Australians are being urged to check whether they have an irregular heartbeat known as atrial fibrillation, which dramatically increases the risk of stroke, as an Awareness Week (September 18-24) kicks off across the nation.

A new [White Paper](#) released by hearts4heart identifies atrial fibrillation (AF) as the cause for 6,000 strokes every year, with one-in-four of these occurring in people who are undiagnosed and therefore unable to take preventative measures.

While AF can be detected by a simple pulse test to check heart rate, as many as 30 per cent of the 460,000 Australians with the condition remain undiagnosed and at heightened risk of stroke.

Left untreated, an irregular heartbeat can cause blood to pool in a chamber of the heart and form a clot that can travel to the brain, causing a devastating stroke.

As part of AF Awareness Week, hearts4heart is setting up free, mobile heart testing stations in hospitals and pharmacies across the nation, which it believes could detect thousands of cases of AF.

Tanya Hall, CEO of hearts4heart, is urging Australians, particularly those aged over 65 years or with existing heart conditions, to make an appointment with their doctor to get tested or visit a local testing station [\[see list\]](#). She is also encouraging them to routinely ask for pulse testing during blood pressure and general health checks – an important step since AF is not always picked up by a single pulse reading.

Ms Hall is also calling on doctors, pharmacists and other healthcare professionals to speak to patients about pulse testing, as well as federal, state and territory politicians to support measures to ensure AF screening becomes standard across Australia.

"Atrial fibrillation-related strokes can be prevented, but diagnosis remains the critical first step. With AF costing the health system \$1.63 billion every year, there is no excuse for complacency," she said.

Stroke Foundation Chief Executive Officer Sharon McGowan lent her support to AF Awareness Week. "Stroke remains a leading cause of disability and death in Australia and atrial fibrillation is an important and treatable risk factor for stroke," she said.

"We don't want a stroke to be the first time any Australian discovers they have an irregular heartbeat. Pulse checking is quick, it's simple and could ultimately save lives," Ms McGowan concluded.

While a healthy heart generally beats between 60 and 100 times per minute, atrial fibrillation may cause this to increase to more than 400 beats per minute. The condition is associated with a five-to-sevenfold increase in the risk of stroke and a threefold increase in the risk of heart failure.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact hearts4heart CEO Tanya Hall on 0426 240 636.