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Feel the beat to prevent stroke

Thousands of Australians are living with an undetected killer putting them at serious risk of stroke, and this number is on the rise.

Around 460,000 Australians have atrial fibrillation (AF), an irregular heartbeat, which can have fatal consequences if left untreated. Shockingly, around 100,000 Australians were estimated to be living with the condition undiagnosed.

hearts4heart Clinical Adviser Dr David O'Donnell said stroke was the most serious consequence of the condition.

"Patients with AF are five times more likely to have a stroke than those in the general community," Dr O'Donnell said.

"Further, the strokes caused by AF are more commonly severe or fatal than those caused by blood clots for other reasons, so detecting and treating this dangerous condition is vital to our health."

[Research](#) indicates AF's impact is on the increase. The number of Australians aged over 55 with AF was expected to double by 2040.

This Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Week (17-23 September) hearts4heart is joining with the Stroke Foundation to encourage Australians to 'feel the beat' by hosting free screening events around the country.

hearts4heart Chief Executive Officer Tanya Hall said Australians must act now to reduce their risk of stroke and heart disease caused by AF.

"Atrial fibrillation is the most common type of abnormal heart rhythm, but once detected, it can be managed," Ms Hall said.

"We are urging people to attend a screening event in their local area or visit their own health provider to get checked for atrial fibrillation.

"During Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Week put your health first by getting a simple, free, and fast check."

Stroke Foundation Chief Executive Officer Sharon McGowan said while your risk of AF and stroke increased with age, the diseases could impact anyone of any age.

"Currently, there is one stroke every nine minutes in Australia and by 2050 this number is expected to increase to one stroke every four minutes. Yet most strokes can be prevented," Ms McGowan said.

"More than 80 percent of strokes can be prevented by managing conditions - including AF - and living a healthy lifestyle.

"Join us this Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Week and help fight this undetected killer."

During Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Week (17-23 September), hospitals across Australia will conduct screenings, test heart rates, and provide education for people on atrial fibrillation. For a list of events visit www.hearts4heart.org.au

Recognising the increasing incidence of AF in the community, Australia's first guidelines for the diagnosis and management of adult patients with atrial fibrillation (AF) were released by the Heart Foundation and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (CSANZ) in August. [For more on the Guidelines.](#)

Case studies available on request

Stroke Foundation media contact: Emily Granland **e)** media@strokefoundation.com.au
m) 0408 000 409 www.strokefoundation.com.au

Hearts4heart media contact: Tanya Hall **e)** tanya.hall@hearts4heart.org.au **m)** 0426 240 636 www.hearts4heart.org.au

Atrial fibrillation is a particular type of irregular heartbeat. In a healthy heart, all four chambers beat at the same time, somewhere between 60 and 100 times per minute. If someone has an irregular heart, the left side of the heart (left atrium) beats rapidly and unpredictably and can beat irregularly at over 400 times per minute. If untreated, it can result in a high risk of stroke.

Atrial fibrillation affects up to 460,000 Australians and causes around 36 percent of strokes. The condition costs the Australian economy at least \$1.25 billion every year.

hearts4heart is a health promotion charity, supported by clinicians, working to improve the diagnosis, treatment and quality of life for people affected by heart rhythm disorders. It advocates on behalf of all patients to Government for better treatment options, such as drug therapies and catheter ablation.

Stroke Foundation is a national charity that partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We stand alongside stroke survivors and their families, healthcare professionals and researchers. We build community awareness and foster new thinking and innovative treatments. We support survivors on their journey to live the best possible life after stroke.