



## 2026-27 Budget submission

Tackling Australia's biggest burden of disease

A submission by the  
National Heart Foundation of Australia

# Heart health needs to be a priority for everyone in Australia

In this submission, we propose three evidence-based initiatives with a strong focus on prevention and care. With investment from the Australian Government, the Heart Foundation's initiatives can set the nation on the right path to secure a healthy future and achieve the healthiest hearts in our nation's history. If implemented, we can ease Australia's biggest disease burden, reduce costs to our healthcare system, and help every person in Australia to live healthier, better lives.

Australia's report card on our national health and wellbeing shows that we are not tracking well.<sup>3</sup> The rate of chronic disease among the Australian population has been rising over the last 15 years,<sup>3</sup> with about half of the Australian population now living with at least one chronic condition.<sup>4</sup> Heart disease alone sends over 400 people to hospital every day, causes one in four deaths and costs the healthcare system over \$16.9 billion every year.<sup>1,2</sup>

The Heart Foundation has a long-term vision that by 2050 heart health will be achievable for everyone in Australia.<sup>5</sup> Over the last 60 years our work has had a sizable impact on people's heart health, but we still have work ahead of us to get us closer to achieving this vision.

The Heart Foundation's three proposed initiatives can help more people in Australia to:

- Lift their physical and mental health and reduce their risk of chronic disease, including heart disease and stroke
- Get their blood pressure under control and receive better clinical care following a heart attack
- Be supported through their recovery after a heart event and live well with heart disease



# Proposal snapshot: Three initiatives to improve Australia's heart health

The Heart Foundation is seeking investment from the Australian Government for three evidence-based initiatives that will:



1

**Get Australia moving to prevent chronic disease and improve physical and mental health**

**\$13.2 million over 4 years**

Invest in continuing the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative's comprehensive package of community-centred programs that boost physical activity and help to prevent chronic disease.

This initiative aligns with at least ten of the Australian Government's strategies including the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021 – 2030*, *National Obesity Strategy 2022 – 2032*, and the *Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians*.



2

**Provide better clinical care to prevent heart disease and recover well from heart attacks**

**\$800,000 over 12 months**

Invest in the design and delivery of tailored national education and awareness initiatives based on the latest clinical evidence. This will improve clinical care by helping more people control their blood pressure, reduce risk of developing chronic disease and improve their recovery from a heart attack.

This initiative complements the *Acute Coronary Syndromes Clinical Care Standards*<sup>6</sup> and the work of the National Hypertension Taskforce of Australia including the national priorities set out in the *National Hypertension Taskforce Roadmap (2022–2030)*<sup>7</sup>.



3

**Keep people out of hospital and living well with heart disease**

**\$500,000 over 12 months**

Invest in increasing access to the MyHeart MyLife patient support program to ensure heart-healthy living for people who have heart disease.

This initiative aligns with aim 2 of the Australian Government's *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021 – 2030* by providing support for physical and mental wellbeing for people living with heart disease.

# Get Australia moving to prevent chronic disease and improve physical and mental health

The Heart Foundation is seeking a total investment of \$13.2 million over 4 years from the Australian Government to deliver the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative. With this support, we will continue to deliver this sustainable initiative that motivates people to be physically active, reduces their risk of developing chronic diseases and improves their physical and mental health.

A copy of our full proposal for the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative can be found in Attachment 1.

We thank the Australian Government for demonstrating their continuing confidence in this initiative through their 1-year funding commitment, announced in December 2025 as part of the new budget measures in MYEFO\*.

## Physical inactivity is a major public health issue for Australia

Being physically active is vital for a healthy heart and for maintaining physical and mental wellbeing. At the recommended levels, physical activity can lower the risk of heart disease and stroke by up to 20%, reduce depression and anxiety, and help people maintain a healthy weight. <sup>8,9,10</sup>

However, most people in Australia – four out of every five adults – do not get enough physical activity, placing them at higher risk of heart disease and stroke as well as other chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. <sup>4,11</sup> Chronic diseases continue to be the leading causes of death, disability and health system spending in Australia. <sup>12</sup> In 2023-24, chronic health conditions accounted for over half (54%) of Australia's annual disease-related healthcare spending, which was about \$98 billion. <sup>2</sup>

Without immediate action to get more people moving, Australia risks greater pressure on the health system, and the loss of economic and productivity gains associated with a healthier, more active population. <sup>13</sup>



\* MYEFO, mid-year economic and fiscal outlook

## Rationale: Why invest in the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative?

The Heart Foundation National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative is a proven solution to get people moving through regular physical activity.

Built on our track record of providing on-the-ground support over three decades, the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative helps people to understand the health benefits of regular physical activity and how to make it part of their daily routine. With this approach, many people can overcome the most commonly reported barriers, like “not enough time” or “too many other commitments”.<sup>14,15</sup>

Through this initiative, the Heart Foundation has:

- **Gained 30 years of experience in getting people moving across Australia.** Established in 1995, Heart Foundation Walking grew from only a few groups in Queensland to the nationwide program it is today.
- **Grown our walking program 10-fold in 8 years.** Investment from the Australian Government in 2017 helped us grow Heart Foundation Walking groups to include well over 400,000 walkers in 2025.

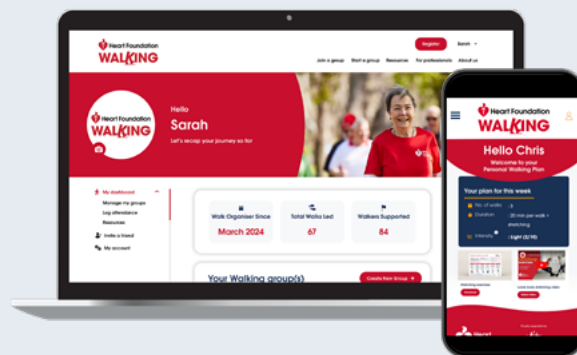
- **Established 812 walking groups across Australia with groups in every electorate.** Heart Foundation Walking is Australia’s largest free walking program, with walking options for everyone including shopping centre circuits, bushwalks, aqua walking, and local neighbourhood and park walks.
- **Invested in dozens of community-led initiatives that boost physical activity among priority populations.** We fund grants for innovative initiatives led by communities that help people most at risk of heart disease to be more physically active.
- **Supported inclusive communities by building social connections.** Over 90% of participants report that being part of Heart Foundation Walking is important for their social and mental wellbeing.

The National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative is evidence-based and informed by the breadth of the Heart Foundation’s work in preventive health, healthy eating patterns and heart healthy living. Through the Heart Foundation’s expertise in data analysis, we can identify which priority populations are at the highest risk of heart disease and help to direct support where it is needed most.

Printable Personal Walking Plan



Online dashboard



Community Walkability Checklist



# Proposal 1: \$13.2 million over 4 years

The Heart Foundation is seeking an investment from the Australian Government to continue delivering the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative from 2026 to 2030. This initiative will help to boost physical activity among people in Australia and reduce their risks of developing chronic diseases.

Over the next 4 years, we will continue to deliver the initiative's suite of programs and activities that are designed to tackle the common barriers to physical activity. Delivery of the program is guided by our partnerships with key peak and commercial organisations and our goal to ensure equitable access to physical activity for all people in Australia, particularly priority populations who may face unique challenges to being physically active. These programs and activities were developed under the National Walking Initiative with previous investment from the Australian Government.

The initiative will be delivered across five pillars:

1

## Get more people moving through walking.

We will increase participation in Heart Foundation Walking, growing the number of walking groups, walkers and uptake of Personal Walking Plans.

### Programs & activities:

*Heart Foundation Walking program*

2

## Support the health sector to socially prescribe physical activity

We will boost social prescription for physical activity by encouraging more health professionals to refer their patients to programs like Heart Foundation Walking.

### Programs & activities:

Clinical and health professional education with supporting resources for clinical practice

3

## Invest in community-led and community-designed physical activity initiatives that are locally and culturally relevant.

We will fund more grants that boost physical activity for priority population groups who are at higher risk of developing chronic disease.

### Programs & activities:

*Active Australia Innovation Challenge grant program*

4

## Shape built environments for people to be active more easily

We will continue to promote best practice for the design of healthy built environments through our evidence-based resources for urban planning practitioners, local governments and other key infrastructure and housing stakeholders.

### Programs & activities:

*Healthy Active by Design*

5

## Enhance public understanding about the health benefits of physical activity

We will promote the health benefits of physical activity to millions of people across Australia, raising awareness about how they can get moving and improve their health.

### Programs & activities:

National multi-media awareness campaigns

The proposed investment in the National Physical Activity and Walking Initiative aligns with at least ten of the Australian Government's strategies including the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021 – 2030*, *National Obesity Strategy 2022 – 2032*, and the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's *Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians*, spanning five or more government portfolios.

# Provide better clinical care to prevent heart disease and recover well from heart attacks

The Heart Foundation is seeking an investment of \$800,000 over 12 months from the Australian Government to lead a national education and awareness initiative that will help prevent heart attacks and reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases.

We will design, develop and deliver a tailored implementation strategy to roll out the newly-updated clinical guidelines for both high blood pressure and acute coronary syndromes to health practitioners and communities across Australia. The new clinical guidelines address current gaps in clinical care and public health knowledge, enabling more people to reduce their risk of developing heart disease and receive better care in their recovery from heart attacks.

## Background

In Australia today, two-thirds of people who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure (hypertension) are not controlling it to healthy levels.<sup>16-18</sup> This places millions of people in Australia at higher risk of coronary heart disease, the leading cause of disease burden in Australia,<sup>19</sup> as well as other chronic conditions including stroke and kidney disease.<sup>20</sup>

Managing high blood pressure can be more challenging for some populations due to a combination of clinical, systemic and social factors, particularly for women, First Nations people, older adults and people living in regional and remote areas.<sup>20-24</sup> There are also potentially millions more people in Australia at higher risk of chronic disease, with as many as half the population estimated to be unaware that they have high blood pressure.<sup>16</sup>

Acute coronary syndromes (heart attack and unstable angina) account for more than half of the annual hospital admissions for coronary heart disease.<sup>1</sup> Outcomes for acute coronary syndromes are often poorer for women, First Nations people, older adults and people living in regional and remote areas, driven by higher cardiac event rates, comorbidities, missed or delayed diagnoses, and inequities in healthcare access.<sup>1,25-30</sup>

The economic impact of high blood pressure and acute coronary syndromes is significant, costing the Australian health system \$4.5 billion and \$1.9 billion each year, respectively.<sup>31,32</sup>

### In Australia:

- **About half of adults** with high blood pressure are unaware that they have it<sup>16</sup>
- **2 out of 3 people** who have been diagnosed with **high blood pressure** are not being treated effectively enough to control it<sup>16-18</sup>
- **More than half of the hospitalisations** related to coronary heart disease are due to **heart attack or unstable angina**<sup>1</sup>

## Rationale: Why invest in our education and awareness initiative?

The newly-updated Australian clinical guidelines for high blood pressure and acute coronary syndromes could help more people to better manage their blood pressure, reduce the risk of a future heart attack and reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases. In the first update since 2016, these guidelines bring together the last decade of research advances to set the new standard of care for diagnosing, treating and managing high blood pressure and acute coronary syndromes.

However, without initiatives to integrate these guidelines into clinical practice, few people in Australia will be able to realise the health benefits of receiving the latest evidence-based standard of care. This will leave people at continued risk of a serious heart event or developing a range of chronic diseases.

The Heart Foundation is well placed to drive uptake of the new guidelines by delivering a highly effective, national education and awareness initiative, making sure that the right information reaches the right audience.

## Our record of delivery: national rollout of the Australian cardiovascular risk guidelines

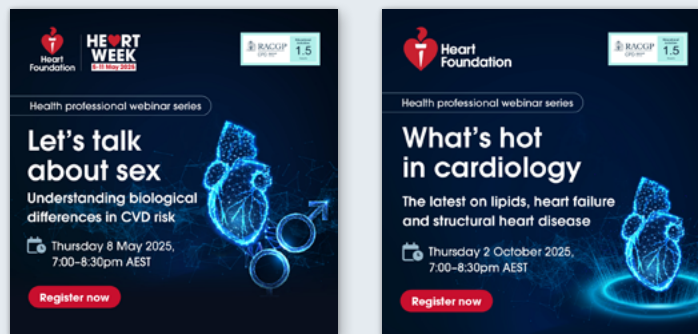
In 2023, the Heart Foundation led the national rollout of the new Australian Guideline for assessing and managing cardiovascular disease risk. As part of this work, we:

- **Ran several national campaigns** to raise awareness among health professionals, policymakers and members of the public that reached millions of people. The campaigns highlighted new opportunities to identify and manage risk of cardiovascular disease and led to a **20% increase** in delivering Heart Health Checks in clinical practice.
- **Developed and delivered accredited clinical education** webinars and primary care roadshows for health practitioners to increase uptake of the new guideline, digital tools and embed best practice in clinical care.<sup>33</sup> Our clinical training is highly valued by primary care health professionals, attracting an average of over **1,900 registrations** for each event and just under **44,000 live and recorded views** to date.
- **Developed and delivered the award-winning Aus CVD Risk calculator**, a digital prevention tool to help health professionals predict cardiovascular risk in their patients.<sup>34</sup> Our national campaign has driven **1.7 million uses** of this tool since its launch.

### Awareness campaign posters



### Health professional webinar series



### Primary Health Network Roadshow series



## Proposal 2: \$800,000 over 12 months

**With investment from the Australian Government, the Heart Foundation will design, develop and deliver a tailored national education and awareness initiative to implement the updated Australian clinical guidelines for hypertension (high blood pressure) and acute coronary syndromes across Australia.**

The Heart Foundation's education and awareness initiative will embed the latest standard of care into routine clinical practice, helping more people to understand and manage their blood pressure, reduce their risk of developing heart disease and chronic conditions and receive better care in their recovery from major heart events.

For the first time, the new guidelines provide guidance to support more equitable diagnosis, treatment and management of high blood pressure for specific groups including: women, First Nations people, older adults and people living in regional and remote areas.

We will deliver an implementation strategy for each guideline using our proven, well-established approaches such as:

- **National campaign targeting health professionals** to raise awareness of the new guidelines among doctors, nurses and allied health practitioners in primary care clinics, outpatient and speciality clinics, hospitals, community health settings and telemedicine across Australia.

- **Health awareness campaigns targeting the public**, leveraging our strong reach across the community and targeting communities who are most at risk.
- **Accredited clinical education for health practitioners**, which is tailored to support easy adoption of the new guidelines into clinical practice.
- **Developing and promoting resources and tools that support clinical decision-making** to help embed best practice in clinical care.

Launched in 2025, the new acute coronary syndromes guideline (*Australian clinical guideline for diagnosing and managing acute coronary syndromes 2025*) was developed by the Heart Foundation and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (available at [www.heartfoundation.org.au/for-professionals/acs-guideline](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/for-professionals/acs-guideline)).

The new hypertension guideline (*2026 Australian Guideline for the Diagnosis and Management of Hypertension*) is currently being developed by the Heart Foundation, Stroke Foundation and Hypertension Australia with oversight from the National Hypertension Taskforce of Australia and their 2030 Roadmap, which was launched in 2022 by the Hon Mark Butler, Minister for Health. The new guideline is on track for launch in 2026.

**This proposal complements the *Acute Coronary Syndromes Clinical Care Standards* developed by the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care (Australian Government) and the national priorities set out in the *National Hypertension Taskforce Roadmap (2022–2030)*<sup>35</sup> and its main objective to increase national blood pressure control rates from 32% to 70% by 2030.**

# Keep people out of hospital and living well with heart disease

The Heart Foundation is seeking an investment of \$500,000 over 12 months from the Australian Government to increase awareness of and access to our MyHeart MyLife patient support program. This program helps more people living with heart disease to stay out of hospital and live healthier lives after their diagnosis.

## Background

Every day in Australia, a heart attack will send about 150 people to hospital and lead to 19 deaths.<sup>36</sup> People with existing heart disease are at increased risk of further cardiac events, with around one in three experiencing a recurrent heart attack.<sup>37</sup>

People who have had a recent heart attack or major heart event are also at increased risk of poor mental health, including depression and anxiety.<sup>38,39</sup>

As the leading cause of disease burden in Australia, coronary heart disease costs the nation over \$2.5 billion in healthcare expenditure annually.<sup>1</sup> By supporting people to live well with heart disease, we can decrease avoidable hospitalisations, reduce deaths and lower healthcare costs.

3



## Rationale: Why invest in the MyHeart MyLife patient support program?

For over two decades, the Heart Foundation has helped more people to live well with heart disease. MyHeart MyLife is the Heart Foundation's free, 12-week support program, which provides evidence-based heart health information, expert guidance, practical tips and resources. For both patients and carers, the program is tailored to how recently someone had a heart event and to suit where they live, whether its metro, regional, rural or remote.

Regular communications motivate and inspire participants to make heart-healthy choices, take their medicines as prescribed, and connect with others living with a heart condition.

Upon completing the 12-week program:<sup>40</sup>

- 87% of participants reported increased knowledge and understanding of their heart condition
- 81% of participants reported they had made changes to improve their diet and follow a heart-healthy eating pattern
- Half (50%) of participants reported they had increased their amount of weekly physical activity

With Australian Government investment in the MyHeart MyLife program, we can help more people recover well following a heart event, help keep them out of hospital and live healthier lives.

“

*MyHeart MyLife was a great support tool that answered a lot of questions and reduced the fear and anxiety of not knowing the best path forward. It filled the void that was not provided by my cardiologist or GP.*

Steve Potter, age 67, South Australia

“

*I refer to (MyHeart MyLife resources) all the time and it keeps me honest to myself and I know there are others in the same boat as me. Thank you for that.”*

Jacqueline Irvine, age 68, Victoria

# Proposal 3: \$500,000 over 12 months

With this investment from the Australian Government, the Heart Foundation will deliver the MyHeart MyLife patient support program, expand its reach and increase access for people living with heart disease across Australia.

For several decades, MyHeart MyLife has provided information and support to people living with heart disease, no matter where they are on their journey from recovery to long-term chronic disease management. The program is tailored to deliver the right information at the right time, helping participants improve their physical and emotional wellbeing and live well with heart disease.

With the Australian Government's investment, we will deliver:

- Targeted campaigns to increase awareness and participation in the program among people living with heart disease across Australia.
- Tailored resources for high priority communities across Australia, providing relevant and accessible information for people at higher risk of cardiovascular complications.

- Activities to enhance awareness of and access to a growing peer support community that connects people living with heart disease with others on a similar recovery journey.
- Education and clinical tools for health professionals, boosting referral rates to the program and supporting best practice management of coronary heart disease in line with the latest clinical guidelines.

This investment will ensure people in Australia who are living with heart disease continue to have access to a trusted, proven patient support program that adapts to people's needs, strengthens recovery, and improves long-term heart health outcomes.

The MyHeart MyLife program aligns with Aim 2 of the Australian Government's *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021 – 2030* which states that “all Australians live in good health and wellbeing for as long as possible” through support for physical and mental wellbeing to improve health outcomes for people living with heart disease.

Program flyers



Online portal



Heart-healthy eating flyer



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[heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)

# Thank you for helping us in our fight to *save* Australian hearts.

To arrange a meeting or discuss these priorities, please contact:

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The Heart Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and Elders past, present and future.

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