

# From the *heart*

SPRING EDITION

COVER STORY  
**UNLOCKING  
THE SECRETS OF  
GROWING HEARTS**

**LIKE FATHER,  
LIKE CHILD: ARE  
DADS THE KEY?**

**JOY'S LEGACY  
OF GIVING**



A NOTE FROM US

Our hearts together



I'm delighted to welcome you to the Spring edition of From the Heart. The stories in this issue are a true testament to the impact we can have on hearts and lives when we come together.

Our fight against heart disease isn't something we can do alone. It's your generosity that fuels the work we do every day. And when we unite around a common cause – to save the hearts of people in Australia – our impact is amplified.

In the pages of this issue, we shine a light on the power of prevention – from life-transforming research to bright strategies to get people moving.

You'll meet 2023 Vanguard grant recipient Dr Sophie Wiszniak, who is investigating how a congenital heart condition can develop in the womb. Finding the causes will help develop new treatments for this life-threatening condition.

As well as Professor Philip Morgan's work to adapt an evidence-based lifestyle program to address the heart health of Aboriginal fathers and their children.

There are also inspiring ideas from local communities that are helping to get people moving, thanks to the Active Australia Innovation Challenge grant, funded by generous donors like you.

We at the Heart Foundation, our partners and our community are incredibly grateful for your relentless support. Thank you for continuing to stand with us.

David Lloyd  
Chief Executive Officer  
Heart Foundation

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NEW

With you every step of the way:




Our new MyHeart MyLife support program is here

Being diagnosed with heart disease is a life-changing experience. It's common for people to feel worried, confused or overwhelmed at times. People need information and support to stay well and to get back to doing the things they love.

Thanks to your generous support, the brand new MyHeart MyLife patient support program launched at Parliament House in Canberra in August. The free digital program is a game-changer for people with heart disease in Australia.

Delivered over 12 weeks, participants have access to a rich library of evidence-based heart health information, practical tips and guidance tailored to their needs. Recognising that each person's journey to recovery is unique, participants receive tailored information that covers a range of topics, from heart-healthy habits and heart medicines to mental health and relationships.

MyHeart MyLife features

-  An interactive online dashboard where people can access bite-sized articles and short videos
-  Supportive text messages and emails with heart-healthy tips and practical advice to motivate and inspire
-  Access to the MyHeart MyLife online support community to foster connection with others on a similar journey

For more information about visit [MyHeartMyLife.org.au](https://MyHeartMyLife.org.au) or scan here:



HEALTHY LIVING

Skip your way to heart health

Did you jump rope growing up? What was your favourite trick? Although the humble skipping rope has the power to entertain children, sadly, most of us lose our enthusiasm for skipping as we get older.



Yet this simple exercise has a surprising number of benefits – from improving heart health and bone density to boosting cognitive function, coordination and even your mood.

It's something 72x time jump rope world champion Luke Boon knows well.

He fell in love with the sport as a child, starting a skipping team on his street when he was 11. Luke is one of the most decorated athletes in jump rope history, a sport rapidly growing in popularity worldwide. He's now determined to share his love of this sport with people of all ages and abilities.

“I recommend jumping rope to anyone looking to boost their physical activity and heart health, as it offers a full-body workout that is fun and effective. It's also incredibly accessible, requiring just a rope and some space. When I tell people I jump rope, they all say, 'I did that at school too'”  
Luke Boon

That's because the Heart Foundation has taught generations of Aussies to skip through 40 years of championing the Jump Rope for Heart program.

It's an iconic part of Heart Foundation history and we hope that we can inspire people to rediscover skipping and it's health benefits. If you need motivation, consider joining this brand new challenge to 'Skip Your Way for 30 Days' in November and help save Aussie hearts.

Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned skipper, this challenge will strengthen your heart, boost your mood and raise funds to help the hearts of others.

Benefits of skipping

There are many reasons to get out your jump rope. Skipping:

-  Is suitable for all ages and skill levels
-  Only takes 10 minutes a day to have an impact
-  Boosts heart health and aerobic fitness
-  Improves bone density and muscle strength
-  Can improve circulation, balance, coordination and overall motor skills
-  Releases feel-good endorphins
-  Requires minimal equipment and space
-  Is a lot of fun!

For more information about healthy living or how to get involved in our Skip Your Way challenge visit [heartfoundation.org.au](https://heartfoundation.org.au)





*Lifesaving research like this is only possible because of the donations we receive from the community and generous supporters like you. Thank you for supporting our mission.*

## RESEARCH

# Unlocking the secrets of growing hearts

A baby's heart begins to develop early during pregnancy, and by about 6 weeks, a functioning heart is formed. But in about 1 in 100 babies, something goes wrong. This is called a congenital heart condition, and it is the most common birth defect in Australia.

Congenital heart conditions are present from birth and can affect blood flow to the heart and the rest of the body. Some babies need invasive surgeries to correct the abnormalities, and in many cases it can be life-threatening. Many congenital heart conditions are also progressive, meaning the condition often gets worse as the child grows into adulthood if it's not properly monitored and treated.

In most cases, there is no known cause for congenital heart conditions. However, research has shown that some things are known to increase the chances of developing one, including certain genetic conditions; a family history of congenital heart conditions; some infections during pregnancy; poorly managed type 1 or type 2 diabetes; or a mother taking certain medicines, smoking, drinking alcohol or using recreational drugs during pregnancy.

How these things result in the structural issues of a baby's heart is not yet known. By understanding how these defects happen during fetal development, new treatments

or strategies to prevent these defects from happening can be created.

That is where Dr Sophie Wiszniak comes in. Dr Wiszniak leads the Angioscience and Cardiovascular Development Group at the University of South Australia. She received a 2023 Vanguard grant to investigate how congenital heart conditions can arise during fetal development.

Her work focuses on a specific type of cell in a baby's developing heart which sends signals to other cells to tell them how to create the pulmonary artery and valve – the crucial path that blood takes from the heart to the lungs to collect oxygen. Dr Wiszniak aims to understand how these signals work, and how they change in the case of congenital heart conditions.

"Most of my discoveries are at the microscopic level. I spend a lot of time examining heart cells under the microscope. It's exciting when a gene or protein I've been studying shows an interesting pattern in these cells, suggesting it might be involved in heart defects,"



Dr Sophie Wiszniak  
University of South Australia

says Dr Wiszniak. "There is much more work to do, but these small discoveries help us to fit one more piece into the complex puzzle that is heart development."

Dr Wiszniak is passionate about finding the underlying causes of congenital heart disease to develop new treatments that could help so many babies and their families in future. But she can't do this without research funding. She is very grateful for the generous donations that help support her work. Dr Wiszniak says, "my Heart Foundation Vanguard Grant allows me to keep advancing this incredibly important research."

**“ Thanks to your generous contributions, I can keep taking steps towards new treatments to reduce the impact of congenital heart conditions. This would not have been possible without your support. ”**

**Dr Wiszniak**





Like father,  
like child:  
Are dads the key  
to healthier hearts?

Fathers have a unique and powerful influence on their children’s weight and health behaviours from a young age. Despite this, fathers often lack representation in children’s health research and community programs.

Professor Philip Morgan and his team at the University of Newcastle are putting dads at the centre of their family’s health, with their lifestyle program Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids. It helps fathers become positive role models by improving their and their children’s physical activity and dietary behaviours. The program has seen success overseas, adapted for Hispanic families in the US, German families and fathers in Scottish prisons.

Professor Morgan is now working with PhD student and Ngarabal man Jake MacDonald to adapt the Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids program for Aboriginal families living on Darkinjung Country (Central Coast, NSW). Jake is an Aboriginal man from the Darkinjung community and has worked closely with Professor Morgan and his research team to address the heart health of Aboriginal fathers and their children. Heart disease is the leading cause of early death amongst Aboriginal men.

This project is taking a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal health by prioritising the cultural values of local fathers and their children.



“We look forward to the positive impact this project may have on the lives of local Aboriginal fathers and their children”  
Professor Morgan

“By designing a culturally appropriate, accessible and engaging program, we aim to achieve widespread, lasting improvements in the heart health of Aboriginal fathers and their children,” says Professor Morgan.

The research team is supported by cultural governance structures, as local Aboriginal fathers and community leaders have helped shape the program design resulting in the development of ‘biya yadha gudjagang yadha’: Healthy Dads, Healthy Mob.

The Heart Foundation’s funding was critical to Professor Morgan’s research, allowing the team to test the effectiveness and practicality of the adapted program. If successful, the research could be used as a framework for developing larger scale projects in different communities by working with local Aboriginal people to improve heart health.

For more information about innovative research and programs funded by the Heart Foundation made possible due to your ongoing support, visit [heartfoundation.org.au/research](https://heartfoundation.org.au/research)

# Winning ideas boost community heart health

Regular exercise is one of the best things you can do for your heart. That’s why the Heart Foundation is constantly looking for ways to promote physical activity and improve the heart health of people in Australia.

That includes our Active Australia Innovation Challenge (AAIC) grant program which funds innovative projects designed to build more active communities.

In its sixth year, the 2024 AAIC recently awarded ten organisations grants of up to \$50,000 to transform their bright idea into a reality. From bustling urban centres to some of our most remote communities, these initiatives showcase creativity and community spirit while promoting physical activity and wellbeing.

“These projects exemplify the innovative spirit and dedication of our communities to improve heart health through increased physical activity”



“By supporting these initiatives, we are fostering healthier lifestyles and stronger communities across Australia” says Erin Bowen, National Manager of Health, Research & Innovation at the Heart Foundation.



## Bikes for kids in remote communities

In remote Australian Indigenous communities, children often lack access to bikes and the infrastructure needed to maintain them. Revolve ReCYCLING aims to establish bike libraries in these remote communities in the Northern Territory, fostering “bike equity” by redistributing unused bikes to children in need. Managed by local Indigenous groups with support from schools and community services, the program will provide bikes, tools, and maintenance workshops. This initiative promotes the joy of cycling, builds equity in remote communities and encourages children to form healthy commuting habits.

For more inspiration, visit [heartfoundation.org.au/aaic](https://heartfoundation.org.au/aaic) to learn more about the Active Australia Innovation Challenge and it’s innovative projects.



## Active Connections

Cheltenham Community Centre wants to get its culturally and linguistically diverse community moving more. So, the Centre will offer free tryout sessions for activities such as pickleball, Qigong, walking groups, outdoor bowling, and introductory ball sports for children. With its inclusive, welcoming space, the Centre empowers everyone to engage in physical activity, addressing barriers through cultural sensitivity, language accessibility, and tailored programming.



# Joy's legacy of giving

Keith recently shared with us some fond memories of his Aunt Joy's life and legacy.

When I discovered Aunt Joy had left a gift in her Will to the Heart Foundation, I wasn't surprised. Giving was Joy's way of life – she even bought my mum's first car!

She was always looking for ways to help. From committees and boards to funding scholarships, she devoted herself to giving back to the community and investing in the next generation.

For Joy, giving to the Heart Foundation was close to home. As a nurse, she witnessed countless lives impacted by heart disease. And her brother-in-law, my dad, was born with a hole in his heart and told he wouldn't live past 20. Supporting heart research made sense to her.

Fortunately, my dad lived into his early 40s, but it was a hard life. Open heart surgery back in the early 1970s meant he was in hospital for nine months. Now, thanks to advances in medical research funded by gifts like Joy's, people can recover in less than a month.

Joy has inspired me to also give what I can. I feel a sense of pride knowing her gift will help shape the future of heart health in Australia.

“Aunt Joy's generosity has always made me proud.”

*Life-saving breakthroughs in heart disease are possible because of your kind donations. Leaving a gift in your Will is one of the many ways you can support vital research and give your loved ones another reason to be proud. Visit [heartfoundation.org.au/do-them-proud](https://heartfoundation.org.au/do-them-proud) to learn more.*

*Joy pictured with loved ones through the years*

# Thank you

for giving hope to all those impacted  
by heart disease in Australia

