



2025 Federal Election Statement

Tackling Australia's biggest killer:
heart disease

Contents

The issue	3
Summary of our 2025 federal election statement	4
The impact	5
Proposal 1	6
Get Australia moving through the National Walking Initiative – \$11.4 to \$15.5 million over three years	
Proposal 2	9
Remote Laundries Project: Community led laundries to help end Rheumatic Heart Disease – \$50.1 to \$90.6 million over six years	
Proposal 3	12
Save the Medicare Heart Health Check and expand community take-up - \$5 million over three years	
References	15



The issue

Urgent action from the next Australian Government is needed to tackle Australia's biggest killer: heart disease.

With over four million Australians living with a cardiac condition,¹ the future health of the nation is at risk without urgent intervention.

Every year:



Cardiovascular disease is the underlying cause of 1 in 4 deaths in Australia²



45,000 people die from cardiovascular disease⁴



Nearly 570,000 people are hospitalised due to cardiovascular disease³



Cardiovascular diseases costs governments across Australia \$12.7 billion⁵



Tackling Australia's biggest killer, a disease that is largely preventable, will save lives and reduce future healthcare expenditure.

Summary of our 2025 federal election statement

This election statement outlines three initiatives to prevent cardiovascular disease, promote better heart health, and reduce healthcare expenditure:

1 Get Australia Moving through the National Walking Initiative – \$11.4 to \$15.5 million over three years:

- ✓ A free to participate program that gets Australia moving again through community walking groups and individual personalised walking plans.

2 Remote Laundries Project: Community led laundries to help end Rheumatic Heart Disease – \$50.1 to \$90.6 million over six years:

- ✓ Developing laundry facilities across remote First Nations communities to reduce incidence of scabies, help bring an end to rheumatic heart disease, as well as supporting local job creation.

3 Save the Medicare Heart Health Check and expand community take-up - \$5 million over three years:

- ✓ Making the Medicare Heart Health Check permanent and expanding practice nurse and nurse practitioner scope of practice to increase delivery.
- ✓ Community Outreach Campaign: Investing \$5 million in public awareness and primary healthcare recall programs.



The impact

Implementing the proposed initiatives will significantly enhance individual health outcomes, boost productivity, and reduce strain on the healthcare system.

Improved Health Outcomes:

Expanded access to preventive care will reduce the incidence of heart disease, stroke, and other chronic conditions. Through early intervention, more people will receive appropriate treatment for cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors, leading to fewer hospital admissions and deaths.

Cost Savings for the Healthcare System:

Reducing preventable cardiovascular events will lower the demand for expensive emergency care and hospitalisations. By shifting resources toward prevention, the proposals will create long-term savings for the healthcare system.

Stronger Communities and Improved Well-being:

The National Walking Initiative will promote healthier lifestyles and encourage social connection, improving physical and mental well-being and reducing social isolation.



Get Australia Moving through the National Walking Initiative – \$11.4 to \$15.5 million over three years

A sustainable program encouraging physical activity through community walking groups, personalised walking plans, as well as partnerships with healthcare providers and local councils to promote active environments and healthier lifestyles.

A copy of our full proposal for The National Walking Initiative can be found at Attachment 1.

Introduction

Physical inactivity is a major public health issue in Australia, contributing significantly to chronic diseases, including heart disease—the leading cause of death in the country. Despite advances in healthcare, many people in Australia remain physically inactive, with one in four deaths linked to heart disease or stroke.⁶

Successive governments have invested in the Heart Foundation's National Walking Initiative, recognising it as a proven solution to promote healthier lifestyles. Through accessible walking programs, the initiative empowers individuals and communities to improve physical and mental well-being. This proposal outlines a plan to sustain and expand the initiative's already impressive reach from 2025 to 2028. The initiative is in line with Australia's long-term goal of enhancing physical activity for all.⁷

Rationale for the Initiative

Walking is one of the most accessible, low-cost physical activities. It requires no special equipment and can be integrated into everyday life. However, environmental, social, and logistical barriers still limit participation among specific groups, including people in remote areas, culturally diverse communities, and individuals facing socio-economic challenges.

The National Walking Initiative addresses these barriers by fostering community-led walking groups, offering personalised walking plans, and promoting active lifestyles. Research indicates that 30 minutes of physical activity per day, such as walking, can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease mortality by 35%.⁸ Furthermore, physical activity improves mental well-being, reduces social isolation, and decreases healthcare costs.⁹

The initiative also encourages collaboration with the healthcare sector and will help support health professionals to socially prescribe physical activity.

A substantial proportion of the population in Australia remains inactive.



Only one in five adults meet the levels of physical activity recommended in the Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines.¹

37%

Of adults aged 18 – 64 are insufficiently physically active.²

And among those who are insufficiently physically active:²

28%

Did less than 30 minutes of physical activity in the last week.

25%

Were completely physically inactive (that is, did no physical activity in the last week).

Proposed Actions and Program Components

Community Walking Groups

The National Walking Initiative supports local walking groups led by volunteer organisers. These groups offer participants a sense of belonging, encourage regular physical activity, and help reduce isolation—particularly among older adults. Currently, women make up 88% of group participants, with the average age being 58, highlighting the initiative's success in engaging people who have not yet responded to their increased risk of heart disease.

Personal Walking Plans

Personal Walking Plans provide customised six-week programs tailored to participants' activity levels and goals. They include motivational emails, SMS support, and downloadable resources. Future improvements through this proposal will incorporate step data tracking, gamification, and integration with other health metrics such as sleep and nutrition. These enhancements will support sustained engagement and help participants transition from low to regular physical activity.

Support for Health Sector Engagement

The National Walking Initiative is well positioned to continue and expand our partnership with health professionals in social prescribing of physical activity to their patients. GPs and allied health practitioners will be provided with resources to integrate walking into clinical care. By encouraging social prescribing, the initiative aligns with preventive health strategies and promotes lifestyle changes for chronic disease management.

Creating environments that support physical activity as part of everyday life

Through collaboration with local councils, urban and transport planners, developers, engineers, communities and other stakeholders, the National Walking Initiative advocates for the development of built environments that support physical activity as part of everyday life. Under this proposal resources such as the Heart Foundation's Healthy Active by Design toolkit will be further updated and enhanced to help guide the development of infrastructure to support physical activity, including walking, for recreational and transport purposes.

The Active Australia Innovation Challenge

Offering grants to foster creative projects that promote physical activity in diverse communities, the Challenge seeks innovative ideas to boost activity levels in targeted groups. By supporting these locally led initiatives, the Challenge aims to reduce chronic disease risks, foster healthier, more active communities, and advance national priorities in heart disease prevention.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Building on the success of campaigns that the Heart Foundation has successfully rolled out, such as "Walking Wins," the National Walking Initiative will continue to raise awareness about the importance of physical activity. Future efforts could include a National Walking Month, as well as engaging individuals, workplaces, and schools to promote daily walking habits. These campaigns will be tailored to reach priority groups, ensuring equitable access to health messaging.



Expected Outcomes and Benefits

The National Walking Initiative will deliver measurable improvements in health, social connection, and economic outcomes:

Health Improvements: Increased physical activity will reduce the incidence of heart disease, diabetes, overweight and obesity, and mental health disorders.

Social Benefits: Walking groups foster community cohesion and reduce loneliness, especially among older adults and disadvantaged groups.

Economic Impact: Reduced healthcare costs through fewer hospital admissions and less reliance on medical interventions.

Funding Request and Justification

The Heart Foundation seeks \$11.4 million to continue delivering the National Walking Initiative or \$15.5 million to significantly expand its reach and impact. The higher funding scenario will allow the introduction of new resources, larger community grants, and an enhanced public awareness campaign. This investment aligns with Australia's ongoing commitment to invest in preventive health by supporting people to live healthier and more active lives.¹⁰



Remote Laundries Project: Community led laundries to help end Rheumatic Heart Disease – \$50.1 to \$90.6 million over six years

Delivering remote community laundries to improve health, social and economic outcomes for remote First Nations communities and reduce rheumatic heart disease.

A copy of our full proposal for the Remote Laundries Project, including detailed costings, can be found at Attachment 2.

Introduction

Access to functional housing including utilities such as reliable power, hot water and working washing machines is fundamental to good public health. However, many remote First Nations communities in Australia face significant barriers in overcrowding and poor sanitation including lack of access to washing facilities. These barriers contribute to the prevalence of infectious diseases, such as scabies, trachoma, acute rheumatic fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD). Without intervention, it is projected that 663 people will die from RHD by 2031, costing the government an estimated \$273 million in healthcare expenses. RHD disproportionately affects First Nations children with mortality rates of ARF and RHD 5.2 times higher than the non-Indigenous population.¹¹

This proposal to expand Remote Community Laundries is a joint initiative between the Aboriginal Investment Group (an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation) and the Heart Foundation. It aims to improve health, quality of life and social and economic outcomes for First Nations communities by providing accessible, well-maintained laundries in remote communities. This initiative aligns with the national RHD Endgame Strategy, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap priority reforms, and priorities for health equity and preventative care in improving health outcomes for communities with the highest needs.¹²

Rationale for the Initiative

Access to functional health hardware such as laundry facilities is directly linked to better health outcomes. This is particularly the case in remote First Nations communities where crowded living conditions, limited access to working washing machines, and inadequate infrastructure exacerbate health risks. This results in higher rates of preventable diseases, including RHD, scabies, and kidney disease. The Remote Community Laundry project leads to improved health, quality of life and better social and economic outcomes for First Nations communities. This creates better outcomes for individuals, their families, their communities and the health system.

The Remote Laundries Project addresses these gaps by:

- Engagement with First Nations leadership in the design and delivery of Remote Community laundries
- Providing safe, free, accessible facilities that enable regular washing of clothing and bedding for improved hygiene and prevention of infectious disease
- Providing a hub for community engagement, empowerment and connection and platform for public health messaging
- Providing employment, education and training to improve socioeconomic and educational outcomes for the community.



Proposed Actions and Program Components

Construction of Laundry Facilities

Establish up to 53 laundry facilities across remote communities over five years, targeting areas with the greatest need.

- **Location Priorities:** Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia, where the burden of RHD and other hygiene-related diseases is highest.
- **Community Involvement:** Engage local stakeholders and First Nations organisations in the planning and implementation process to ensure culturally appropriate facilities and community ownership.

Operations and Maintenance

- **Facility Management:** Employ local staff and provide training to ensure sustainable operations. Each facility will include washing machines, dryers, and spaces for health education and promotion.
- **Monitoring and Support:** Implement regular monitoring to ensure facilities remain operational, with technical support available to address issues promptly.

Health Education Programs

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Collaborate with community members and leadership to deliver health education and awareness campaigns alongside the rollout of laundry services.
- **Partnerships with Schools and Clinics:** Integrate health promotion efforts with schools and clinics, promoting healthy habits from an early age.

Community Impact and Engagement

- **Social Benefits:** Encourage greater community engagement through safe, shared facilities, fostering community engagement, empowerment and connection.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Create jobs and training opportunities in communities, contributing to economic and workforce development in remote regions.



Expected Outcomes and Benefits

The Remote Laundries Project will deliver multiple benefits:

- **Health Improvements:** Reduce the incidence of RHD, scabies, and other hygiene-related diseases.
- **Economic Impact:** Lower healthcare costs by preventing diseases that would otherwise require expensive treatment and hospitalisation.
- **Social and Community Benefits:** Strengthen community bonds and provide employment opportunities, promoting local economic development.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** Enhance living conditions and hygiene standards, ensuring all Australians, regardless of location, have access to essential services.

Funding Request and Justification

The Heart Foundation and the Aboriginal Investment Group seeks investment from the Australian Government to build and maintain the Remote Laundries Project over the next six years. Our proposal is scalable with three different options:

- Option 1 Full proposal – 53 laundries in NT, QLD, WA and SA - \$90.6 million over six years
- Option 2 Northern Australia proposal – 47 laundries in NT, QLD and WA - \$65.2 million over six years
- Option 3 Northern Territory only proposal – 33 laundries in NT - \$50.1 million over six years

The Remote Laundries Project offers a practical solution to a significant public health challenge in Australia's remote communities. By improving access to essential laundry services, the initiative will reduce preventable diseases, lower healthcare costs, and promote healthier, more resilient communities. With investment from the next Australian Government this initiative will make a lasting difference, helping to close the gap in health outcomes for First Nations Australians and ensuring everyone has access to basic hygiene services, regardless of where they live.



Save the Medicare Heart Health Check and expand community take-up - \$5 million over three years:

Introduction

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in Australia. Each year more than **45,000 people die from cardiovascular disease**, and more than **568,000 people are hospitalised**.¹³ The Medicare Heart Health Check (MBS items 699 and 177) has played a key role in preventing heart attacks and strokes since their introduction in 2019. More than three-quarters of a million people have now had their risk of heart disease assessed by a GP.

However, these items are set to **expire on 30 June 2025**, posing a risk to the continuity of preventive care given that more than 2.5 million people in Australia are at high risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years.¹⁴ This proposal recommends the Australian Government invest in the long-term future of the Medicare Heart Health Check through the following two initiatives:

1. **Making the Medicare Heart Health Check permanent.**
2. **Launching a \$5 Million Community Outreach Campaign** to raise awareness, engage healthcare providers, and bring heart health programs into the community.

Making the Medicare Heart Health Check Permanent

The first initiative in this proposal calls for the Medicare Heart Health Check, **MBS items 699 and 177, to be made permanent**. This will secure ongoing access for individuals aged 45+, and 30+ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Evidence from a trial conducted in Australian primary care supports the acceptability and effectiveness of heart health assessments in increasing risk factor assessment and therapeutic management of CVD risk.¹⁵

Modelling data indicates that treating high-risk people in Australia according to evidence-based guidelines could prevent over 67,000 cardiovascular events and reduce healthcare costs by \$1.175 billion over five years.¹⁶ Improved cardiovascular risk factor management also lowers risks of cancer, dementia, end-stage renal disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It also enhances cognitive function and quality of life, and it reduces healthcare costs despite longer life expectancy.

In addition to making the item permanent the Heart Foundation also recommends the following reforms be introduced to improve the effectiveness of the item:

- **Expand provider access** by allowing nurse practitioners, practice nurses, and Aboriginal Health Workers to conduct assessments.
- **Support digital health integration** by linking patient records with follow-up systems, ensuring continuous care.
- **Introduce practice-level incentives** through MyMedicare, encouraging proactive screening and sustainable care models.

Making the Medicare Heart Health Check permanent is the most important decision the next Australian Government can take to secure the long-term heart health future of the nation.

Community Outreach Campaign – \$5 Million Heart Health Initiative to expand take-up of Medicare Heart Health Checks (3 Years)

The second initiative of this proposal is for the next Australian Government to invest in a three-year, \$5 million initiative to boost the effectiveness and take-up of Medicare Heart Health Checks. The initiative is broken down into two core components:

Public Awareness Campaigns – \$3 Million (Six-Week Blocks)

- **Investment:** \$1 million per year over three years.
- **Details:** Run coordinated campaign blocks across social, digital, print, radio, and TV platforms to raise public awareness about heart health.
- **Goal:** Engage the public and promote the importance of Medicare Heart Health Checks, encouraging more people to take preventive action.

Primary Healthcare Recall Programs – \$2 Million

- **Investment:** \$660,000 per year over three years.
- **Details:** Collaborate with GP practices to deliver recall programs for at-risk patients. These programs will focus on geo-targeted booking systems in high-risk Local Government Areas (LGAs).
- **Goal:** Ensure proactive identification and recall for individuals at risk, driving attendance for Medicare Heart Health Checks.



Expected Outcomes and Benefits

- **Improved Health Outcomes:** Early detection and intervention will reduce heart disease, strokes, and hospitalisations.
- **Long-Term Cost Savings:** Preventive care reduces the demand for emergency and hospital services, creating significant savings for the healthcare system.
- **Increased Access and Equity:** Expanding provider access and running community programs ensures vulnerable populations—including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—receive life-saving care.
- **Public Engagement:** Medicare Heart Health Checks awareness campaigns will see more people visit their GP to get their heart checked, helping to identify and treat those most risk at a heart attack or stroke.



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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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