



Cardiovascular Specialists Warn Against ‘Disease Fatigue’

Australian cardiovascular (CVD) specialists are today warning against apathy toward CVD research in light of an apparent ‘disease fatigue’ that has robbed the sector of funding momentum.

Speaking on behalf of the sector, Prof. Tom Marwick said; “There’s this mistaken view that cardiovascular diseases have by and large been addressed and that we’ve done all that can be done to curtail their impact and alleviate patient suffering. This is a dangerous myth that perpetuates a sense of false comfort for the community.

“The truth is we’ve made good headway toward reducing the rates of stroke and heart attack, aided in no small part by declining rates of smoking. However, the underlying trends show that three in 10 Australian deaths are due to circulatory diseases, and coronary heart disease remains the leading cause of death in Australia.”ⁱ

Research is critical to better prevention, diagnosis and early treatment. In recent years, Australian researchers have pioneered early identification of patients who are at highest risk of a heart attack, made discoveries to reduce babies being born with congenital heart defects and developed techniques in heart transplantation to increase the number of heart donors.

But despite clear analysis showing that heart and vessel disease provides returns on research investment greater than any other major disease burden, this sector consistently receives proportionately less support from philanthropic and public sectors. From 2008 – 2013, the proportion of NHMRC funding to CVD research has hovered at around 14.5 per cent of overall national health research funding.

In response to the funding crisis in cardiovascular diseases, a national alliance of high-profile researchers and peak bodies will today launch the Australian Cardiovascular Alliance (ACvA). The ACvA aims to be Australia’s peak leadership body for the advancement of research into heart, stroke and vascular disease and will lobby as a united voice to advocate for critical attention in this space.

Speaking on behalf of the alliance, Founding Chairman, Professor Jaye Chin-Dusting said; “Amongst researchers and health professionals, there is deep concern about the capacity crisis in CVD research due to the lack of growth in peer-reviewed funding, combined with a lack of alternative funding available to other disease groups. We’re seeing a real sense of ‘disease fatigue’ from funders.”

Debunking some of the common myths around heart disease, today’s launch will feature 21 year-old biology student ‘Shaun’ who was diagnosed with Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM) at 15 years of age - a condition that has affected four generations of his family. HCM is the most common cause of sudden death in people under 30 and the most commonly inherited heart condition. Shaun was 18 when he was racing to catch a bus to school and his heart suddenly went into cardiac arrest.

“I spent the next two weeks in hospital, with my family at my bedside. I feel really lucky to be here today and I owe a great debt of gratitude to a quick thinking passer-by and paramedics who came to my assistance.”



“There’s still so much about HCM that the doctors don’t understand. Unfortunately, the condition is unpredictable – it is often silent and individuals at risk may have no symptoms. For people like me, research into treatment and prevention of this condition is critical. It gives me hope for my future and that of my future children.”

Commenting on the ACvA initiative, Prof. Marwick said, “Heart and vessel disease is responsible for about \$15 billion in the national health expenditure and this is projected to rise sharply over the next two decades with the rising incidence of obesity and diabetes. Stroke alone costs Australia \$5 billion a year. Our most vulnerable tend to be worst affected such that the socioeconomically challenged, the elderly, our Indigenous people are all groups with the highest rates of hospitalisation and death from these diseases.”

Quick facts about the ACvA:

The founding Board of the ACvA includes:

- Professor Jaye Chin-Dusting, Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, Founding Chairman
- Research Associate Professor Livia Hool, University of Western Australia, Secretary
- Professor Stephen Nicholls, South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, Treasurer
- Professor Jon Golledge, James Cook University
- Professor Tom Marwick, Menzies Institute for Medical Research
- Professor Kerry-Anne Rye, University of New South Wales
- Professor Bob Graham, Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute

The remit of the ACvA is to:

- Advocate for increased peer-reviewed funding for research into heart, stroke and vascular disease
- Represent cardiovascular researchers in advocacy to State and Federal Governments
- Increase the visibility of cardiovascular diseases as a National Health Priority Area with the general public
- Promote strong collaboration between cardiovascular researchers nationally

The ACvA has two types of memberships and will accept applications from both individuals and organisations. For more information, visit: www.ozheart.org

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Interview opportunities:

For interview with Professor Tom Marwick, contact:
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ⁱ <http://www.aihw.gov.au/deaths/>