

National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance

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New Absolute Risk Assessment to Prevent Death and Disability

A new guideline, endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council, has been released to help General Practitioners (GPs) and other health professionals save hundreds of thousands of people from death and disability caused by Australia's biggest killer, cardiovascular disease (CVD).

The Absolute Cardiovascular Risk (AR) Assessment Guideline has been developed by the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance (NVDPA) made up of Kidney Health Australia, Diabetes Australia, the National Heart Foundation of Australia and National Stroke Foundation.

Cardiovascular (heart, stroke and blood vessel) disease accounts for 34 per cent of all Australian deaths. Smoking, blood pressure, cholesterol, diet, weight, alcohol intake and exercise, together with age, sex and family history are just some of the factors that contribute to the risk of developing CVD. Around a quarter of the Australian population live with three or more risk factors, some without realising.

The AR Assessment Guideline will allow GPs to consider all risk factors together when assessing the likelihood a patient will develop CVD within five years. An online calculator, and the Australian risk charts included in the guideline, will determine if the patient is at high, moderate or low risk so that prevention and management can be planned according to the individual's risk.

"Single risk factors like high cholesterol provide a poor estimate of a patient's overall risk of developing CVD," said Mark Harris, Professor of General Practice, University of NSW and Chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Red Book Taskforce. "By providing a more accurate prediction of future events, the AR Assessment will help GPs tailor prevention which is more effective".

An AR Assessment is recommended for all Australians aged over 45, however Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be tested from 35 years. The AR Assessment Guidelines, online calculator and recommendations for reducing risk factors are now available from NVDPA member websites (listed below).

Dr Erin Lalor, NVDPA Chair, said "By preventing chronic illnesses like heart or kidney disease, stroke and diabetes, the AR Assessment Guideline can ultimately reduce the pressure faced by acute health services".

The guideline is based on the Framingham Risk Equation (derived from the Framingham Heart Study, a large cohort study) which showed superior predictive ability at the time it was developed. Other risk equations published more recently may be included in future versions of the guideline after further testing in the Australian population.

The NVDPA formed in 2000 to work together on reducing chronic health problems that affect thousands of Australians. The NVDPA has approached the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing about developing a management guideline to complement the resources already available.

For links to the AR Assessment Guidelines, risk chart and calculator: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au; www.heartfoundation.org.au, www.kidney.org.au, www.strokefoundation.com.au, www.cvdcheck.org.au

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