

National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance

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New GP guideline recommends heart and stroke assessment from 45 years

According to a new guideline for General Practitioners (GPs) Australians should be assessed for their risk of cardiovascular disease from the age of 45 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from 35 years.

Heart, stroke and blood vessel disease, known together as cardiovascular disease (CVD) is Australia's biggest killer, accounting for 34 per cent of all deaths. Around a quarter of the Australian population live with three or more CVD risk factors.

The new guideline features recommendations and tools to help GPs, Aboriginal health workers and other health professionals determine the likelihood a patient will develop CVD within five years. By implementing the new guideline in General Practice, hundred of thousands of people could be saved from death and disability from CVD.

To assess risk, GPs will use blood pressure, age, cholesterol, whether the patient smoke, and whether the patient has other risk factors such as diabetes, kidney disease, irregular heart beat and a family history of premature CVD. With a more accurate prediction of whether the patient is at high, moderate or low risk, prevention can be better targeted.

"Using the new guideline and recommended tools to assess the risk of developing CVD only takes a few minutes," said Sydney based GP, Dr Philip Lye. "It is extremely helpful for GPs to advise patients of their overall risk so that realistic ways for preventing future disease can be discussed and agreed upon".

The guideline was developed by the National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance (NVDPA), made up of Kidney Health Australia, Diabetes Australia, National Heart Foundation of Australia and National Stroke Foundation. The NVDPA was formed in 2000 to reduce chronic health problems that affect thousands of Australians.

"Everyone over 45 is urged to ask their GP for an assessment. By learning their personal risk, Australians have a better chance of preventing heart, blood vessel disease or stroke from developing, worsening or recurring," said Dr Erin Lalor, NVDPA chair.

"Preventing chronic diseases like heart or kidney disease, stroke and diabetes can ultimately reduce the pressure faced by health services".

The guideline has been endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council and recommendations for managing and reducing risk factors are available from NVDPA member websites. The NVDPA has also approached the Australian Government Department and Health and Ageing about developing a management guideline to complement the resources already available.

Further information available from the NVDPA member websites: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au; www.heartfoundation.org.au, www.kidney.org.au, www.strokefoundation.com.au

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