

For immediate release Thursday 21 September 2006



## **Health Minister and tennis great call on Australians to act FAST**

Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott and tennis great John Newcombe today called on Australians to act **FAST** when seeing the signs of stroke

Launching a national campaign to inform Australians about **FAST** – an easy way to recognise and remember the signs of stroke, Minister Abbott said that this was an important health message for all Australians that could save lives and reduce disability.

Stroke is Australia's second greatest killer and a leading cause of disability. In 2006, Australians will suffer 53,000 new and recurrent strokes – that's one stroke every 10 minutes.

John Newcombe, a stroke survivor himself, said that many stroke patients don't get to hospital fast enough because the signs of stroke are not recognised, but that acting **FAST** when seeing the signs of stroke was vital, as the faster a patient gets diagnosed and treated, the greater the chance of reducing damage to the brain.

**FAST** is a simple test for stroke. **FAST** stands for **F**acial weakness, **A**rm weakness, **S**peech difficulty, **T**ime to act. Using the **FAST** test involves asking three simple questions:

- **Face** – Can the person smile, has their mouth or eyes drooped?
- **Arms** – Can the person raise both arms?
- **Speech** – Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **Time** – Act **FAST** and get medical attention.

John Newcombe said that he did not act FAST when he experienced the signs of stroke. He was relaxing with friends when he suddenly got a dizzy feeling in his head, "The early signs of stroke that I experienced were numbness in my right bottom lip, tip of my tongue and right hand. I probably had signs for over a day before I took myself to hospital."

The signs of stroke may occur alone or together and include:

- Weakness, numbness or paralysis – in the face, arm or leg on either or both sides of the body
- Difficulty speaking or understanding
- Dizziness, loss of balance or unexplained fall
- Loss of vision, sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Headache – usually severe and abrupt onset or a change in the pattern of headaches
- Difficulty swallowing

It's important to get medical attention even if the signs only last for a short period.

The National Stroke Foundation aims to save 110,000 Australians from death and disability from stroke over the next 10 years.

ENDS

**Media contact:** Nicola Edwards (03) 9670 1000, 0416 800790 or Brian M Peck, 0437 515 505 for more information or to interview:

*Dr Erin Lalor, CEO, National Stroke Foundation*

*Dr Christopher R Levi, Medical Director, National Stroke Foundation*

*Professor Chris Bladin, Medical Director, National Stroke Foundation*