



strokefoundation

Stop stroke. Save lives. End suffering.

Reducing Atrial Fibrillation in Australia

The National Stroke Foundation has released a new report, *The Economic Costs of Atrial Fibrillation in Australia*, which highlights the impact of the condition on Australia's health system.

Why should we pay attention to AF?

Atrial Fibrillation (AF) is a condition that causes an irregular heartbeat and is the world's most common heart rhythm disorder. People with AF are up to seven times more likely to have a stroke than the general population, and up to three times

more likely to experience heart failure. AF-related strokes are also likely to be more severe. As AF is a critical risk factor for stroke, particularly in the elderly, the National Stroke Foundation commissioned the report, *The Economic Costs of*

Atrial Fibrillation in Australia, to investigate the costs and long-term implications of AF on our health system. The report highlights that one in every six strokes, is AF-related. More than 45,000 hospitalisations are caused by the condition.

1 in every 6 strokes is AF related

How many Australians are affected?

Conservative estimates put the number of Australians with AF at 240,000 (1 to 2% of the population), with more than half of those diagnosed being over the age of 75.

However, as AF is one of the most challenging cardiovascular diseases to diagnose, the true figure is likely to be much higher. Studies estimate around 30% of AF is only

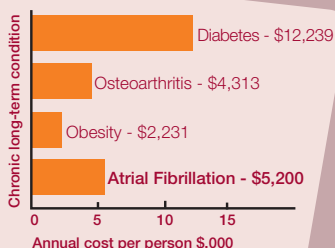
diagnosed after patients are hospitalised for other reasons such as stroke and heart failure. Often, by this stage, diagnosis is too late.

\$1.25b

AF costs the Australian economy \$1.25 billion

So what does AF cost the economy?

- The cost to the Australian economy is **around \$1.25 billion** every year; more than \$5,200 for every person with AF. This is a conservative estimate, and the figure could actually be as high as \$1.8 billion.
- Although there are significant costs associated with the treatment and prevention of AF itself, the cost of treating the consequences – stroke and heart failure – is the greatest expense of all.
- Costs of AF-related stroke and heart failure include around \$439 million spent on total health system expenditure, such as hospital services, GP appointments, stroke and heart failure care, and more than \$186 million for annual disability costs and residential aged care costs. Unpaid care for AF-related stroke and heart failure is a significant burden on society and this has been estimated at around \$135 million per annum.
- While the costs of AF on the health system may seem less than other more well-known diseases, the reality is that the costs for every person with AF are high; higher than osteoarthritis and more than double the estimated costs of obesity. This is because \$797 million (around **64%**) of the \$1.25 billion costs arise as a direct result of stroke, heart failure, or premature death associated with AF. These have significant implications in terms of hospitalisations, long-term disability, loss of productivity and unpaid care.



6,300

6,300 Australians suffer a stroke each year because of AF

What does this report mean for tackling AF?

Although AF is an expensive illness, most of the costs associated with the condition are related to preventable consequences such as stroke and heart failure. Better detection and management of AF has the potential to prevent these events, and minimise the related economic and social costs. This report has clearly demonstrated that we do not have enough information

about AF in Australia, nor do we have sufficient guidelines for managing the condition. Despite the need for further information to complete the picture, it is clear that the growing burden of AF is significant.

A better understanding of the prevalence, and management, of AF could significantly reduce preventable outcomes, such as strokes and heart attacks.

Health system costs of atrial fibrillation	Cost (\$'000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifiable AF health costs (e.g. hospital services, GP costs, specialist medical and pharmaceutical) Stroke health costs (excluding pharma) Heart failure health costs (e.g. hospital and other services) 	\$435,005
Other direct costs (e.g. disability and residential aged care costs)	\$215,750
Non-financial costs (e.g. loss in productivity paid and unpaid work, absenteeism, premature death, unpaid carer costs)	\$223,040
	\$186,741
	\$188,549
TOTAL	\$1,249,085

1. More research is needed to resolve an incomplete picture

We need to start by getting better data on how many Australians are affected by AF. What we currently know about AF in this country is really only the tip of the iceberg, and overall costs could be as much as 45% higher than the current numbers suggest.

AF has been the subject of very few studies in Australia compared to other cardio-vascular diseases and this report relied on international evidence to calculate Australian figures. To better understand the true extent of the disease within Australia, we need greater investment in research and data.

2. We need to better understand how to manage AF

There are currently no clear treatment guidelines in Australia for how to treat AF and Australian clinicians identify AF as one of the most challenging conditions to manage*.



“AF is one of the most challenging conditions for doctors to treat, and all too often it goes undetected.

We need treatment guidelines that will assist doctors with better diagnosis and prevent strokes.”

Neurologist, Professor Chris Levi



“AF is the 300-pound gorilla in the room that no one is talking about. AF stripped me of my quality of life. We don’t know enough about AF and more research is required.”

Steve Quinn, AF patient

\$53m

Up to \$53 million is lost in productivity every year

To read the full version of the report, or find out more visit www.strokefoundation.com.au

The report, 'The Economic Costs of Atrial Fibrillation in Australia', was commissioned by the National Stroke Foundation, conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and funded by an unrestricted educational grant from sanofi-aventis.

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