

# Together we can save **110,000 lives** from stroke over the next ten years.

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## **STROKE IS A MAJOR HEALTH ISSUE**

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**This year, Australians will suffer 53,000 new and recurrent strokes – that’s one stroke every 10 minutes.<sup>1</sup>**

**Over the next 10 years, half a million people in Australia will suffer at least one stroke.<sup>2</sup>**

**A stroke occurs when the brain is deprived of blood. Interrupting the blood flow reduces the oxygen available to the brain causing brain cells to die. The brain damage results in death and disability.**

**Blood may stop moving through an artery to the brain because it is blocked by a blood clot or plaque (an ischemic stroke) or because the artery breaks or bursts (haemorrhagic stroke).**

**Stroke can be prevented by addressing risk factors such as blood pressure, smoking, diet and levels of physical activity.**

**Stroke can be treated, preventing subsequent death and disability.**

One in three people die within a year of having a stroke.<sup>3</sup>

Stroke kills more women than breast cancer.<sup>4</sup>

Men are more likely to suffer a stroke and at a younger age.<sup>5</sup>

Almost one in five people who experience a stroke are under the age of 55.<sup>6</sup>

The ageing of the Australian population will drive an increase in stroke to more than 70,000 a year by 2015.<sup>7</sup>

About 88 per cent of stroke survivors live at home and three-quarters have a disability caused by their stroke.<sup>8</sup>

Depression, anxiety and social isolation are common after stroke.

Stroke impacts on families and friends – hundreds of thousands of people.

About 22 to 30 per cent of stroke survivors will develop vascular dementia, which means there are between 100,000 and 150,000 people with dementia caused by stroke.<sup>9</sup>

The costs of stroke are high, with the present value (2004) of lifetime costs estimated at \$2.14 billion.<sup>10</sup>

The National Stroke Foundation is appealing to Members of Parliament to meet the challenge of stroke – Australia’s second single greatest killer.

The Foundation’s challenge is to save 110,000 lives from stroke over the next 10 years.

The four programs outlined in this document will save lives and improve the quality of life for stroke survivors and their families.

Improved stroke prevention and management throughout the country would free up an estimated \$1.06 billion that could be used for other health priorities.<sup>11</sup>

The National Stroke Research Institute has found, for example, that the Foundation’s *strokesafe*<sup>TM</sup> program, fully-funded and successfully implemented, could achieve significant cost offsets and health gains and that funds committed for health could be redirected within the health sector because of improved stroke prevention and management.

We need your support to implement our four programs as the basis of a national strategy to reduce the incidence of stroke and to meet the needs of stroke survivors and their families.

These programs can save lives and reduce the impact of disability – the long term financial dividend for health budgets is a bonus.



**Dr. John Lill OAM**  
President



**Dr. Erin Lalor**  
Chief Executive Officer

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## NATIONAL STROKE FOUNDATION’S

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## ACTION PLANS

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**THE NATIONAL STROKE FOUNDATION IS URGING  
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO SUPPORT FOUR  
ACTION PLANS TO COMBAT STROKE BY:**

- 1. IMPROVING RECOGNITION AND  
MANAGEMENT OF RISK FACTORS**
  - 2. REDUCING THE DELAY IN GETTING TREATMENT**
  - 3. IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE**
  - 4. IMPROVING LIFE AFTER STROKE**
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## 1 IMPROVING RECOGNITION AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK FACTORS

Hypertension or elevated blood pressure is the major risk factor for stroke. Of the 3.6 million Australians over the age of 25 with high blood pressure, only half of them are treated.

Currently, 7556 strokes are being prevented each year by controlling blood pressure in those with hypertension. However, this figure could be as high as 23,000 per annum if control was increased to 70 per cent of the people with high blood pressure.

A first step towards blood pressure control is to raise awareness and encourage screening.

**This program will implement screening programs so that the 1.8 million Australians who do not know they have high blood pressure are aware of this important health issue and are able to make decisions about treatment.**

### WHAT WE WILL DO

- Develop and pilot public awareness and blood pressure screening programs in the community and workplace.
- Develop and disseminate health literature and on-line programs for consumers.
- Ensure health professionals and consumers with high blood pressure are linked to existing programs such as:
  - The Australian Better Health Initiative Well Persons Health Check
  - Health Assessments for people aged 75 and over
  - Self management programs
  - The Lifescrpts.

## 2 REDUCING THE DELAY IN GETTING TREATMENT

Greater awareness of the signs of stroke and access to prompt medical attention will dramatically reduce death and disability.

Currently 105 instances of death and disability are averted each year with clot-busting drugs. However this figure could be as high as 1737, if people are promptly accessing treatment.<sup>12</sup>

Public health campaigns can increase public awareness of stroke symptoms and reduce the delay in getting patients to an emergency department.

Training paramedics, using tools to improve diagnostic accuracy and rapid ambulance protocols reduce delays in hospital admission.

**This program aims to have every person over the age of 50 understanding the signs of stroke and to develop tools and protocols to reduce delays to treatment.**

### WHAT WE WILL DO

- Develop and implement a nationally standardised stroke education program for health professionals. It is anticipated that by using web-based online education, the program will be readily available in metropolitan, rural and remote centres at reduced cost.
- Continue the strokesafe™ campaign in 2007 with the aim of ensuring that three quarters of the population can recognise at least two signs of stroke.<sup>13</sup>
- Use strokesafe™ community-based education seminars to underpin the campaign locally.
- Provide additional information and support via the website, strokesafe™ publications and the 1800 call line.
- Undertake annual evaluations to monitor awareness levels and to indicate when and how often future stroke awareness campaign should be mounted.

## 3 IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Delivery of evidence-based stroke treatment saves lives and reduces disability.

The best care for stroke patients is in a stroke care unit. But in 2004 there were only 50 units in Australia's hospitals. Three out of four patients do not receive stroke unit care.

Currently 556 instances of death and disability are being averted through evidence-based practice on stroke units but this figure could be as high as 2224 a year if there was greater adherence to evidence-based care.

**This program will enhance the capacity of stroke care professionals and the health system to provide best-practice care to stroke patients.**

### WHAT WE WILL DO

- Work with the Australasian Stroke Unit Network of stroke clinicians to collect information about delivery of stroke care.
- Assess stroke services in hospitals against international best practice indicators, monitoring improvement and looking for additional gains.
- Develop and implement educational strategies to build workforce capacity, utilising the experience of key opinion leaders in Australia and internationally. Strategies will include face to face workshops and on-line educational programs with access for rural and remote health professionals.

## 4 IMPROVING LIFE AFTER STROKE

Today 346,000 stroke survivors live in our community.

Peer support in Australia is considered by those who have had a stroke as critical for recovery but only 4000 stroke survivors are accessing peer support programs.

Better coordination of family, community and health care support will ensure more people will receive these services.

If just 10 per cent of stroke survivors living at home had full access to a complete suite of support services, some 30,000 people would have their quality of life dramatically improved, with reduced risk of suffering conditions such as depression.

**This program will deliver more support, improving life after stroke for survivors and reducing stress on the thousands of family and friends who care for Australians living after stroke.**

### WHAT WE WILL DO

- Undertake a process to strategically link services for stroke survivors and carers with existing health and community services.
- Improve access to services identified by consumers as critical for recovery.
- Evaluate programs for effectiveness and cost efficiency.
- Hold a summit of stroke survivors, carers and health professionals to develop a strategy to meet the needs of stroke survivors and their families including those from specific groups such as young, working stroke survivors; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds; and survivors living in rural and remote regions.

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## DO YOU KNOW THE SIGNS OF STROKE?

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Research in 2003 indicated that less than 70% of Australians could correctly identify a single sign of stroke even though they recognised that stroke was a medical emergency.

If Australians don't know the signs of stroke they are less likely to seek urgent medical attention, which means their chances of dying or being disabled are increased.

The signs of stroke are:

- weakness, numbness or paralysis of the face, arm or leg
- difficulty speaking or understanding
- dizziness and loss of balance
- loss of vision
- headache, usually severe and abrupt
- difficulty swallowing.

These signs mean that immediate medical attention is needed.

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## DO YOU KNOW WHAT CAN CAUSE STROKE?

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Research in 2003 indicated that less than 50% of Australians aged over 40 years could correctly identify risk factors.

Factors that increase the risk of stroke include:

- age
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- lack of exercise
- excessive alcohol
- smoking
- high cholesterol
- poor diet
- irregular rapid heart beat.



### THE NATIONAL STROKE FOUNDATION

The National Stroke Foundation is a not for profit organisation that works with the public, all levels of government, health professionals, patients, carers, stroke survivors and business to minimise the impact of stroke on the Australian community. The Foundation's challenge is to save 110,000 lives from stroke over the next 10 years.

The Foundation was established in 1983 by dedicated neurologists to conduct and promote research into the incidence, causes, prevention and treatment of stroke. Over the past 23 years, it has evolved to become the national body for stroke.

The National Stroke Foundation website [www.strokefoundation.com.au](http://www.strokefoundation.com.au) provides a wealth of information on stroke and our free call telephone help line number is **1800 787 653**.



### References

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