

Media release

4 May 2022

Hunter, New England residents urged to get heart checks in Heart Week following alarming statistics.

Hunter and New England residents are being urged to book in for a heart check this this Heart Week, May 2-8, in light of statistics which reveal that residents in NSW's Hunter and New England regions are 17% more likely to die from heart disease than the national average.

Dr Daniel Rankmore, General Practitioner in Tamworth has outlined the negative affect on screening and heart checks since the emergence of the pandemic. "Since the COVID pandemic began in 2020, many people have postponed or ignored routine check-ups like Heart Health Checks. Now that we are past the lockdowns, we believe it is vital for everybody to refocus their attention on the prevention and management of chronic conditions such as heart disease."

"Understanding your risk of having a heart attack or stroke is the first step in lowering your risk. Your GP or nurse will give you advice on the immediate steps you can take to lower your risk of heart disease, which is particularly important in our region when presented with the alarming statistics."

Heart Health Checks are a 20-minute GP assessment to determine the risk of heart attack or stroke. Heart Health Checks can detect issues with heart health, including coronary heart disease, which is usually the underlying cause of a heart attack - Australia's number one cause of death. Coronary heart disease is caused when the arteries leading to the heart become hardened or narrow.

Laureate Professor Clare Collins from the University of Newcastle, NHMRC research fellow and newly appointed director of the HMRI Food and Nutrition research program said the recent high profile fatal heart attacks suffered by cricket legend Shane Warne and Labor Senator Kimberley Kitching, both in their early 50s, have added an additional sense of urgency for the community. "With one Australian suffering from a heart attack or stroke every 4 minutes, general practice teams have the power to change this statistic by focusing on simple, routine practices that have a measurable lifesaving impact.

"Many people are not aware of their risk factors for heart disease and some risk factors like high blood pressure and high cholesterol can be silent. As we saw through the recent deaths of two prominent Australian's – no one should put off their heart health," Dr Collins added.

To support regularity in heart health checks, The Hunter New England Central Coast Primary Health Network (The PHN), has partnered with The Heart Foundation with a project called Text to Detect Program. This follows the success of the National Heart Health Check Recall Pilot in 2021, the Heart Foundation is offering 200 general practices the opportunity to participate in Phase 2 of the program "Text to Detect". The program supports targeted identification and management of CVD via an innovative SMS recall system.

The University of Newcastle is also engagement with the public through general practices in the NENW on a heart health project called Healthy Rural Hearts (or HealthyRHearts).

The Healthy Rural Hearts or HealthyRHearts project, funded by the Federal Government's Medical Research Futures Fund, is a research trial testing whether increased access to a dedicated nutrition service helps to reduce risk factors for people at increased risk of heart disease.

The PHN CEO, Richard Nankervis has applauded the initiative. "In light of these statistics, there's never been a better time for people in our community to have a heart health check and understand what steps they can take to reduce their risk of heart disease.

"Heart Week provides a great opportunity to raise awareness of heart checks, which aim to streamline heart check reminders, reducing burden on already overloaded general practice teams."

-ends-

For more information:

Rebecca Brennan, Communications and Public Relations Manager rbrennan@thephn.com.au 0437 478 138

The PHN works with health care providers across the Hunter, New England and Central Coast. Through our innovative programs our communities benefit from greater coordination, better systems and improved access to health care.

thephn.com.au