

From the Heart Foundation

A warning against heart disease complacency in 2016

Although death from heart disease in Australia continues to decrease, we cannot rest on our laurels. The greatest barrier to reducing the social and economic toll of heart disease has been complacency. As a nation, we have dropped the ball. It's time to think again.

Heart disease continues to result in more Australian deaths than any other single cause, and remains the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It continues to place a heavy burden on our already stretched health system, demanding the highest expenditure for any individual disease group at \$7.7 billion in 2008–09 (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-health/2014/health-system>).

Most Australians are either sedentary or engage in low levels of physical activity. Obesity among adults has almost tripled in the last two decades (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=6442459497>). Our ageing community, and the success in treating previously fatal heart conditions, means more people are living with heart diseases.

The devastating impact of inaction will see the number of adults with obesity double to 41% by 2031–32, and cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes are estimated to cost the government \$58 billion if recent trends

continue (<http://heartfoundation.org.au/about-us/what-we-do/heart-disease-in-australia/australian-heart-disease-statistics>).

The Heart Foundation has driven great change, but we can only do so much alone. The government has ignored the facts for too long and heart disease remains a national priority in name only. We now need a nationally funded action plan to improve prevention, treatment and research. Investment will pay big dividends and has the potential to save countless lives, improve national productivity and ease the pressure on hospitals.

Our strategy will continue to target inequalities, develop a heart attack survivor initiative, and tackle the causes of heart disease through funding innovative research. However, we need to see strong government, industry and community leadership resulting in lasting change that can help all Australians lead long, healthy lives.



Garry Jennings

National Heart Foundation, Melbourne, VIC.

doi:10.5694/mja16.00052

Podcast with Professor Garry Jennings available at www.mja.com.au/multimedia/podcasts