

## Historic breakthrough for public access defibrillation in Australia

TO THE EDITOR: Over 26 000 Australians experience out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) each year, with almost nine in ten of these patients not surviving to hospital discharge or 30 days.<sup>1</sup> Although it is known that swift defibrillation increases the possibility of patient survival in these situations, and that initial defibrillation by first responders (regardless of training) is associated with greater survival than initial defibrillation by emergency medical services,<sup>2</sup> in Australia, less than 2% of OHCA cases receive defibrillation by a bystander.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that this is driven by the limits to publicly accessible automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in Australian communities.<sup>3</sup>

On 30 November 2022, South Australia took a major step to deal with this problem and reduce death from OHCA. The SA Parliament passed the Automated External Defibrillators (Public Access) Bill 2022,<sup>4</sup> making SA the first state or territory in Australia, and one of few in the world, to mandate the public provision of AEDs. The legislation, introduced by Member of the Legislative Council, the Hon Frank

Pangallo of the SA-BEST party, had bipartisan political support and backing from various organisations, and follows a recent public health campaign to install AEDs in Adelaide. The Bill will come into effect for government and public buildings in 2025 and a variety of private buildings in 2026, with awareness campaigns, grant programs, and communication with organisations being the focus of the interim period. The expected cost to the SA government of \$7.2 million across four years is weighed against the \$2 billion gross domestic product loss that Australia incurs annually as a result of sudden cardiac arrest.<sup>5</sup>

The health and economic benefits of public access defibrillation to Australian society are large. For the benefit of all Australians, other states and territories should follow the example set by SA and move to implement similar laws mandating the public availability of AEDs in their communities.

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