



Australian Capital Territory Budget Submission

2025-2026

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Introduction

For over 60 years, the Heart Foundation has been working to improve heart disease prevention, detection and support for all people living in Australia.

Through the generosity of millions of Australians, we fund high-impact research, build community awareness about living a heart-healthy lifestyle, and support health professionals in their work to prevent, diagnose, treat and manage heart disease.

While improvements to heart health have been achieved, cardiovascular disease continues to have a devastating impact on thousands of people throughout the ACT. In 2022, more than 500 people in the ACT died from cardiovascular disease. This accounts for one in five deaths in our territory.¹ Cardiovascular disease is the most expensive chronic health condition in Australia, costing over \$14 billion each year (\$260 million in ACT), yet it is largely preventable.²

It has never been more important to take practical steps to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease on both the people and the economy of the ACT. Armed with effective strategies and proven interventions, the time for the government to act is now.

The Heart Foundation has laid out practical measures to help prevent people from developing cardiovascular disease, as well as increasing survival rates for those that experience a cardiac arrest.

Fortunately, cardiovascular disease is largely preventable through early identification and management of modifiable risk factors. By adopting healthier lifestyles and utilising preventive medications, we can significantly reduce the risk. One way to achieve this is to raise awareness and enhance participation of Medicare subsidised Heart Health Checks. These checks are vital for early detection and intervention, helping to prevent the onset of cardiovascular disease.

Without action now to address modifiable risk factors through encouraging Canberrans to visit their GP for a Medicare subsidised Heart Health Check, we will see the number of people with cardiovascular disease continue to rise.

Every year, more than 26,000 people in Australia have an out of hospital cardiac arrest, and only around 10% of these people will survive to go home to their families.^{3,6} Quick actions in the minutes after someone has a cardiac arrest have a drastic impact on rates of survival. We need easy and rapid access to automated external defibrillators (AEDs), as this can help save the lives of those suffering a cardiac arrest.

Our budget proposal puts forward practical measures to increase Medicare subsidised Heart Health Checks in the ACT, as well as to improve access to AEDs. These proposals will help save lives and reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease on both the people and the economy in the ACT.



Lauren Ford
General Manager, Australian Capital Territory,
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Summary of priorities

1 *Preventing* heart disease through investing in a public health campaign tailored to the ACT, encouraging at-risk populations to get a Heart Health Check

2 *Reducing* deaths from cardiac arrests by increasing community access and confidence to use life-saving automated external defibrillators in the ACT



Heart health priorities for the Australian Capital Territory government

Since 1961, the National Heart Foundation of Australia has worked to decrease the toll that cardiovascular disease has on our country. In the ACT, we are committed to creating an environment that promotes healthy lifestyles and empowers people to make decisions that prioritise heart health.

The burden of cardiovascular disease on our society and economy will continue to rise without strong policy actions. The ACT government must take action to prevent Canberrans from developing cardiovascular disease and to reduce the death toll from out of hospital cardiac arrests. The Heart Foundation has identified two key priority areas that will have significant impacts on the heart health of those living in the ACT.



1 Preventing heart disease through investing in a public health campaign tailored to the ACT, encouraging at-risk populations to get a Heart Health Check.

- ✓ Reduce rates of cardiovascular disease and save on health expenditure in the ACT
- ✓ Raise awareness of, and increase uptake in Heart Health Checks
- ✓ Encourage Canberrans to work with their GP to make healthy lifestyle changes, reducing the risk of broader chronic diseases.

2 Reducing deaths from cardiac arrests by increasing community access and confidence to use life-saving automated external defibrillators in the ACT.

- ✓ Invest in public access defibrillators in the community and follow the lead of South Australia in passing legislation that mandates the installation of AEDs in priority areas.
- ✓ Introduce a Local Sports Defibrillator Grant Program in the ACT, similar to the program launched by the New South Wales Government in 2022.
- ✓ Invest in a public awareness and education campaign to increase confidence in bystander CPR and use of AEDs.

Preventing heart disease through investing in a public health campaign tailored to the ACT, encouraging at-risk populations to get a Heart Health Check

A Heart Health Check is key to ensuring people remain healthy and detect issues early, before they develop complex chronic conditions that are more challenging and more expensive to treat. Early detection not only reduces the personal and community effects of chronic disease, but can result in a healthier workforce, enhancing productivity and boosting economic growth.

Cardiovascular disease is largely preventable if we identify modifiable risk factors early and manage them with healthy lifestyle changes and preventative medicines. In recent years, Australia has made significant progress towards improving early detection and prevention. One key initiative is the introduction of the Medicare subsidised Heart Health Check. This is a 20-minute check-up delivered in general practice settings to assess a person's risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next 5 years. It also provides tailored advice on healthy lifestyle modifications that can significantly reduce this risk and promote overall cardiovascular health.

The Medicare subsidised Heart Health Check has seen over 830,000 Australians visit their GP for a clinical assessment and management of their CVD risk. This includes over 9,100 people in the ACT.⁴ However, the Heart Health Check uptake rate in the ACT is around 25% lower than the National uptake rate.⁴



To increase the uptake rates in the ACT, the Heart Foundation is seeking an investment of up to \$350,000 to develop and rollout a public health campaign to encourage at-risk populations in the ACT to get a Heart Health Check.

There are three campaign options:

- \$350,000: A six-month promotional campaign covering social media, search engine marketing, native content and radio.
- \$150,000: A three-month digital campaign covering social media, search engine marketing and native content.
- \$50,000: A three-month digital campaign covering social media only.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Australia.¹ Recent estimates show that as much as 38% of the chronic disease burden in Australia could be avoided if modifiable risk factors are reduced throughout the country.⁵ Having a planned and considered approach to increasing the uptake of Heart Health Checks is a significant step and critical measure for advancing preventative healthcare in the ACT.



Reducing deaths from cardiac arrests by increasing community access and confidence to use life-saving automated external defibrillators in the ACT.

The Heart Foundation is seeking an increased commitment from the ACT government to improve survival rates from out of hospital cardiac arrests.

Out of hospital cardiac arrests are a significant public health issue, with more than 26,000 cases each year in Australia.⁶ Survival rates for out of hospital cardiac arrests remain low, with only around 10% of cases surviving to discharge from hospital.⁶

AEDs are life-saving devices that can be used to revive someone who has suffered a cardiac arrest. Early CPR and defibrillation are key out-of-hospital links in the chain of survival, and both have a significant impact on survival rates for cardiac arrests. Evidence from population-based cohort studies have shown that public access to defibrillation can boost survival rates by two to three-fold compared to scenarios where defibrillation is unavailable.⁶

Survival rates after sudden cardiac arrest drop by 10-12% for every minute without defibrillation.⁷ Ensuring that people can access AEDs when they need it will save lives in the ACT. Having AEDs accessible in the event of an emergency enables timely use prior to the arrival of paramedics, greatly increasing the chances of survival from a cardiac arrest.



There are three actions to be taken:

1

Mandating the installation of AEDs in priority areas:

- ✓ The Heart Foundation is calling on the ACT government to follow the lead of South Australia in passing legislation that mandates the installation of AEDs in key locations in our community to increase survival rates from cardiac arrest. Locations to be mandated should include building such as schools, libraries, sporting facilities, theatres and prisons, emergency service vehicles and large privately owned buildings.
- ✓ The Heart Foundation is ready to assist the government in the rollout of such an initiative, which will help save lives and decrease the burden of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests on our community.

2

Introduce a Local Sports Defibrillator Grant Program:

- ✓ The Heart Foundation is calling on the ACT government to introduce a Local Sports Defibrillator Grant Program, modelled after the NSW Local Sports Defibrillator Grant Program.
- ✓ This program aims to increase the availability of AEDs across local sporting clubs, community groups such as Rotary, Scout groups, and broader recreational facilities.⁸
- ✓ An annual investment of \$100,000 should be allocated to the program, providing grants up to \$3,000 per AED package.

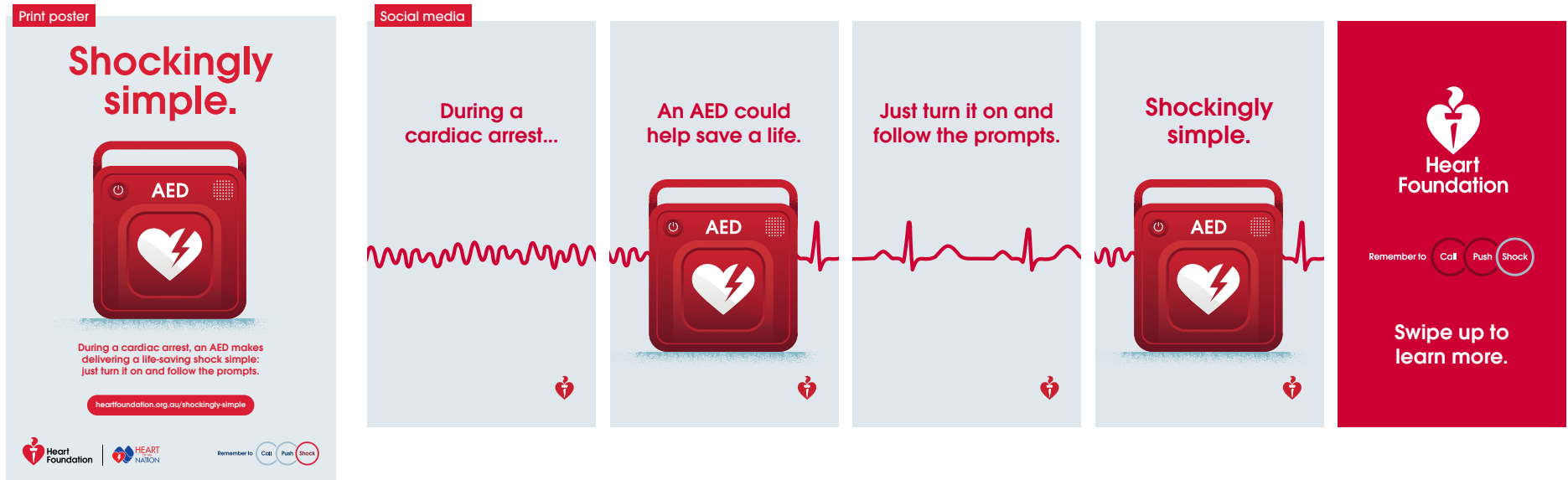


These AED initiatives would be delivered through the current partnership between the Heart Foundation and Heart of the Nation, and in collaboration with the ACT Government and first responders.

3

Invest in a public awareness and education campaign:

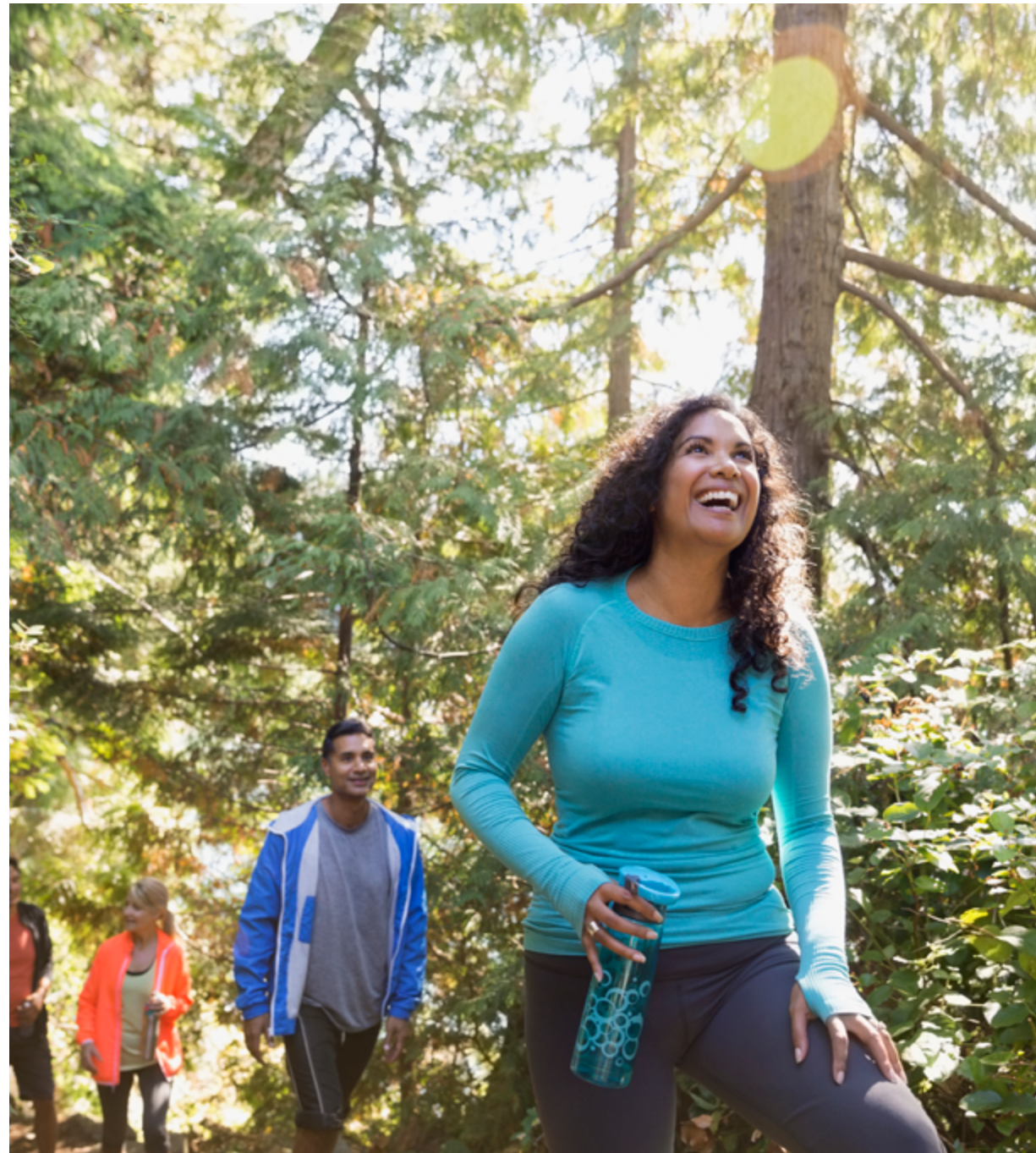
- ✓ Increasing awareness and confidence in using AEDs is crucial. In 2020, on average 84% of Australians had heard of AEDs, only 59% would be willing to use one, and only 20% felt confident (or very confident) in using one during a cardiac emergency.⁹
- ✓ There are many potential barriers to bystander AED use, including availability, legal liability, awareness, training, technological limitations, and psychological factors.⁷
- ✓ An awareness campaign would address these issues by educating the public on the use of AEDs, incorporating lived experience testimonials, dispelling myths, and boosting bystander confidence to act decisively in emergency situations. It would also explore opportunities to improve information on where to find the nearest AED.
- ✓ The Heart Foundation is seeking an investment from the ACT Government of \$150,000 to roll out our “Shockingly Simple” social media campaign. The campaign would run for three months in the lead up to Restart a Heart Day on 16 October and would utilise recently created Heart Foundation collateral designed to dispel myths around AED use, and promote the ‘Call, Push, Shock’ message.



These AED initiatives would be delivered through the current partnership between the Heart Foundation and Heart of the Nation, and in collaboration with the ACT Government and first responders.

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Thank you for helping us in our fight to *save* Australian Capital Territory's hearts

To arrange a meeting or discuss these priorities, please contact:

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