



# Australian Capital Territory Budget 2026-2027

A submission by the  
National Heart Foundation of Australia

# Heart health priorities for the ACT

For over 65 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. In the ACT, the Heart Foundation is committed to creating an environment that promotes healthy lifestyles and empowers people to make decisions that prioritise heart health.

Despite the tremendous advances in prevention and treatment that have been made over the last six decades, cardiovascular disease continues to have a devastating impact on thousands of people throughout the ACT, accounting for one in five deaths in our territory.<sup>1</sup> Cardiovascular disease is also the most expensive chronic health condition in Australia, costing over \$14 billion each year (\$260 million in ACT), yet it is largely preventable.<sup>2</sup>

**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 ACT Government to act is now.**

In this budget proposal, we have put forward two initiatives with practical measures that will help reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease on Canberrans. These initiatives will help to:

1. Prevent cardiovascular disease by helping more people to understand and manage their risks through investing in a public health campaign tailored to the ACT, encouraging at-risk populations to see their GP for a Medicare Heart Health Check.
2. Save more lives from cardiac arrest by increasing community access and building people's confidence to use automated external defibrillators.

With support from the ACT Government, our 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,  
National Heart Foundation of Australia

## Two initiatives to improve heart health 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 Medicare Heart Health Check

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



## Prevent heart disease

The Heart Foundation is seeking investment from the ACT Government for a public health awareness campaign to encourage more people to see their general practitioner (GP) for a Medicare Heart Health Check. This will help more people to better understand and manage their risk of heart disease and takes a significant step forward for preventative healthcare in the ACT.

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.<sup>3</sup>

One key initiative to improve detection and management of people's risk of heart disease is the Medicare-supported Heart Health Check. Delivered in general practice settings, the Medicare Heart Health Check is a 20-minute check-up 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 Heart Health Check has seen over 1,000,000 people across Australia visit their GP for a clinical assessment and management of their CVD risk. This includes over 10,900 people in the ACT.<sup>4</sup> However, the Heart Health Check uptake rate in the ACT is around 25% lower than the National uptake rate.<sup>4</sup>

With investment from the ACT Government, the Heart Foundation's campaign can help to reduce rates of cardiovascular disease and save on health expenditure in the ACT.



1



# Increasing early detection through Medicare Heart Health Checks

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 options for delivering a campaign in the territory:

- 1 \$350,000:**  
A six-month promotional campaign covering social media, search engine marketing, native content and radio.
- 2 \$150,000:**  
A three-month digital campaign covering social media, search engine marketing and native content.
- 3 \$50,000:**  
A three-month digital campaign covering social media only.

Pete Marnock, 59, (pictured right) is a mountain bike racer from Queensland. In 2022, a Heart Health Check with his local GP led to him having lifesaving bypass and valve repair surgery.



*I had no reason to think anything was wrong, but I went for a Heart Health Check anyway. That decision led to life-saving surgery. I tell everyone now: put your ego aside and get checked—it could save your life too.*



Pete Marnock had a Heart Health Check that ended up saving his life.

## Save more lives from cardiac arrests

The Heart Foundation is seeking an increased commitment from the ACT government to improve survival rates from out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. Ensuring that bystanders witnessing a cardiac arrest can access AEDs when they are needed will help save lives in the ACT.

Out-of-hospital cardiac arrests are a significant public health issue, with more than 26,000 cases each year in Australia.<sup>5</sup> Survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests remain low, with only around 10% of cases surviving to discharge from hospital.<sup>5</sup>

Time is critical when responding to a sudden cardiac arrest. Survival rates drop by 10-12% for every minute after a cardiac arrest without defibrillation.<sup>6</sup>

Automated external defibrillators (AEDs) are lifesaving devices that can be used by bystanders to act immediately and revive someone who has had a cardiac arrest before the paramedics arrive. Public access to AEDs has been demonstrated to boost survival rates by two to three-fold compared to scenarios where defibrillation is unavailable.<sup>6</sup>

*In July 2025, the life of a local 16 year old was saved when bystanders responded immediately by performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and using the on-site AED when he had a cardiac arrest playing basketball in Queanbeyan. If there had not been an AED nearby, the outcome could have been tragic for this teenager and his family.*



2

# Commit to actions that will increase access to and use of AEDs in ACT

The Heart Foundation is calling on the ACT Government to take three actions that will help save more lives from cardiac arrest:



## Mandating the installation of AEDs in priority areas:

- We recommend public locations for AED installation should include buildings such as schools, libraries, sporting facilities, theatres, prisons and emergency service vehicles, similar to the approach taken in South Australia.<sup>7</sup> Introducing an integrated AED register within ACT emergency services would complement this legislation and enable increased AED accessibility and faster response times.
- 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.



## Introduce a Local Sports Defibrillator Grant Program:

- The Heart Foundation recommends a similar style of program to the Local Sports Defibrillator Grant Program in place in NSW.
- This program aims to increase the availability of AEDs across local sporting clubs, community groups such as Rotary clubs, Scout groups, and broader recreational facilities.<sup>8</sup>
- An annual investment of \$100,000 should be allocated to the program, providing grants up to \$3,000 per AED package.



## Invest in a public awareness and education campaign:

- Increasing awareness and confidence in using AEDs is crucial. In Australia, while most Australians (84%) have heard of AEDs, only 3 in 5 people would be willing to use one, and only 1 in 5 felt confident enough to use one to respond to a cardiac emergency.<sup>9</sup>
- An awareness campaign could address the key barriers that stop more bystanders from using AEDs.<sup>6</sup> The campaign will provide education for the public on how to use AEDs, incorporating lived experience testimonials, dispelling common myths about issues such as liability and potential

harm, 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.

- An investment of \$150,000 would enable the design and rollout of a three-month digital campaign, which the Heart Foundation is ready to lead. The Heart Foundation would deliver its “Shockingly Simple” public awareness campaign, with creative materials that have been prepared and are ready to roll out in 2026.

Print poster

**Shockingly simple.**

AED

During a cardiac arrest, an AED makes delivering a life-saving shock simple: just turn it on and follow the prompts.

[heartfoundation.org.au/shockingly-simple](http://heartfoundation.org.au/shockingly-simple)

Heart Foundation | HEART NATION | Remember to Call Push Shock

Social media

During a cardiac arrest...

An AED could help save a life.

Just turn it on and follow the prompts.

**Shockingly simple.**

Heart Foundation

Remember to Call Push Shock

Swipe up to learn more.

## References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Causes of Death, Australia. 2024. (Accessed 12 January 2026). Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/latest-release>
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Heart, stroke and vascular disease: Australian facts. (Accessed 12 January 2026). Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/heart-stroke-vascular-disease/hsvd-facts/contents/impacts/expenditure-cvd>
3. Productivity Commission. Innovations in care for chronic health conditions. 2021. (Accessed 12 January 2026). <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/chronic-care-innovations/>
4. Australian Government Services Australia. Medicare Item Reports 699 and 177, billing from April 2019 to October 2025; Available from: [https://medicarestatistics.humanservices.gov.au/statistics/mbs\\_item.jsp](https://medicarestatistics.humanservices.gov.au/statistics/mbs_item.jsp)
5. Bray, J., Howell, S., Ball, S., Doan, T., Bosley, E., Smith, K., Dicker, B., Faddy, S., Thorrowgood, M., Swain, A. and Thomas, A., 2022. The epidemiology of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in Australia and New Zealand: A binational report from the Australasian Resuscitation Outcomes Consortium (Aus-ROC). *Resuscitation*, 172, pp.74-83.
6. Kumar, S, Chow, C, Jan, S and Angell, B (2017). Rapid literature review on public access to defibrillation. Newtown: The George Institute for Global Health.
7. Government of South Australia, SA Health. Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) *requirements for public buildings and facilities*. 2022. (Accessed 12 January 2026). <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/about+us/campaigns+and+projects/automated+external+defibrillators/requirements+for+public+buildings+and+facilities/>
8. <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/grants/local-sport-defibrillator-grant-program> (Accessed 12 January 2026)
9. Cartledge S, Saxton D, Finn J, et al Australia's awareness of cardiac arrest and rates of CPR training: results from the Heart Foundation's HeartWatch survey *BMJ Open* 2020;10:e033722. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-033722



[heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)

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

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

Lauren Ford  
General Manager, Australian Capital Territory  
0418 654 636  
[lauren.ford@heartfoundation.org.au](mailto:lauren.ford@heartfoundation.org.au)

**Terms of use:** This material has been developed by the National Heart Foundation of Australia (Heart Foundation) for general information and educational purposes only. It does not constitute medical advice. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have, or suspect you have, a health problem. The information provided is based on evidence available at the time of publication. Please refer to the Heart Foundation website at [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au) for Terms of Use. © 2026 National Heart Foundation of Australia ABN 98 008 419 761

The Heart Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and Elders past, present and future.

MC-CORP-105.1.0226

