

# Executive summary

## Understanding Heart Failure: A Practical Guide for all Australians

The burden of heart failure is substantial. However, calculating the full magnitude of heart failure's burden is challenging, as the true impact is likely to be higher due to undiagnosed cases.



More than **500,000** people living with heart failure in Australia <sup>1</sup>



Heart failure is the **#1 cause of hospitalisation** for older Australians <sup>2</sup>



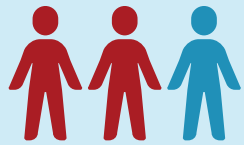
Heart failure accounts for **\$3.1 B** in healthcare costs annually <sup>2</sup>

Heart failure causes **1 million days of hospital stay each year** for Australians over the age of 65. And due to population growth, ageing, and the increasing prevalence of comorbidities, the absolute number of hospital admissions for heart failure is expected to increase by as much as 50% in the next 25 years. <sup>3</sup> Yet, it does not receive the same attention as other common diseases.

### Knowing the risk factors and symptoms of heart failure is key to early diagnosis

Heart failure typically presents with **symptoms** such as **shortness of breath, swelling of the feet or ankles, irregular heartbeat, and fatigue**. However, these common heart failure symptoms can often be dismissed as other health issues, or even old age. As the condition progresses, it can lead to morbidity, hospitalisation, and even death.

**Recent research commissioned by hearts4heart reveals that:**



**2 in 3** Australians remain unaware of risk factors associated with heart disease and heart failure. <sup>4</sup>

This lack of awareness can delay diagnosis, which may contribute to significant healthcare costs, including hospitalisations, the need for primary healthcare support, and lost productivity.

### The importance of heart failure awareness and early intervention

There are several factors that contribute to heart failure, including **family history** of heart disease, **advancing age, high blood pressure, structural abnormalities** in the heart, and even **COVID-19**.



Heart failure accounts for almost **one in 50** deaths <sup>5</sup>



One person dies from heart failure **every three hours** <sup>5</sup>



The rate of heart failure is **90% higher** in rural and Indigenous communities <sup>6</sup>

With early diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle changes, a person with heart failure can reduce their risk of hospitalisation, feel better, and live a longer and healthier life.

**Urgent action is required to address this critical issue, increase awareness, and initiate a national conversation about heart failure.**

# Introduction to "Understanding Heart Failure: A Practical Guide for all Australians"

Developed by hearts4heart, "Understanding Heart Failure: A Practical Guide for all Australians" addresses low awareness and under-diagnosis of heart failure and supports individuals living with heart failure, carers and loved ones.



**raises awareness  
about heart  
failure prevalence**



**increases  
understanding  
of symptoms**



**encourages early  
detection for better  
patient outcomes**

Based on European and American guidelines, the guide provides comprehensive information and a holistic view of heart failure, incorporating perspectives from both clinicians and patients.

## Key features and benefits of the guide

The guide covers essential topics such as:



**1 prevention and  
symptom reduction**



**2 lifestyle  
modifications  
to reduce risk**



**3 diagnostic tools and  
treatment options**

By offering accessible information, the guide helps patients understand their condition and empowers individuals to actively participate in discussions and decisions regarding treatment.

Through initiatives like Heart Failure Awareness Week and this practical guide, hearts4heart offers unique and crucial education, support, and advocacy to reduce the burden of heart failure in Australia.



**1 in 3 of the over 150,000 heart failure related hospital admissions that occur in Australia annually are preventable.<sup>2</sup>**

The burden of heart failure extends beyond the individual - impacting Australia's healthcare system, economy, and the quality of life for those living with the disease and their families.

Members of Parliament and stakeholders have a unique opportunity to make a substantial impact by supporting and promoting **hearts4heart** and the "Understanding Heart Failure" guide, ultimately improving heart health outcomes for their constituents and all Australians.

**Together, through education, early diagnosis, and patient empowerment, we can improve outcomes for those affected by heart failure.**

1. AIHW. (2023). Heart, stroke and vascular disease: Australian facts. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/heart-stroke-vascular-diseases/hsvd-facts/contents/heart-stroke-and-vascular-disease-subtypes/heart-failure-and-cardiomyopathy>

2. Chen L, Booley S, Keates AK, Stewart S. (2017). Snapshot of heart failure in Australia. Mary MacKillop Institute for Health Research, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia

3. McDonagh et al. (2021). ESC Guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic heart failure. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/42/36/3599/6358045>

4. hearts4heart. (2023). Perceptions of heart disease in Australia. [data on file].

5. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, Causes of death 2019, cat. No. 3303.0, October.

6. National and Rural Health Alliance. The disproportionate burden of heart disease in rural and remote Australia. Available at <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/news/disproportionate-burden-heart-disease-rural-and-remote-australia-0>.