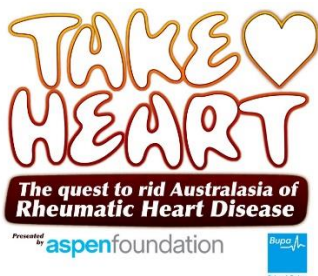


A message from...



These children were born completely healthy with normal heart function. They started life the same way as everybody else and yet they acquired this disease and their heart gets permanently damaged. But, rheumatic heart disease is completely preventable and yet so many children suffer from it. I think that's the saddest part.

Dr Bo Remenyi, Paediatric Cardiologist, Menzies School for Health Research

Health issues that plague Indigenous communities such as...rheumatic fever...need specifically targeted programs to address them...it is essential that these efforts are continued into the future.

Dr Lesley M Russell, Adj Assoc Professor, Menzies Centre for Health Policy, USYD

Australia's first people have amongst the highest rates of rheumatic heart disease (RHD) in the world.

- RHD threatens the lives of 2% of Indigenous Australians living in remote and regional areas and the rate doubles in those aged 15-40.
- An estimated 6000 Indigenous young people in northern Australia are living with rheumatic heart disease or have had acute rheumatic fever which can cause fibrosis of heart valves, leading to crippling valvular heart disease, heart failure and death.
- People often die in their 30s and 40s.
- Each year around 100 young people from the Top End have to be flown to Melbourne or Adelaide for life-saving, open-heart surgery.

RHD is 100% preventable.

- The simple administration of one of the oldest and cheapest antibiotics known - penicillin - can stop acute rheumatic fever graduating into RHD.
- Early detection, diagnosis and management of the disease can reduce life-threatening complications.

Addressing RHD delivers widespread benefits in health, education and employment.

- Focussing on a sentinel condition like RHD not only saves lives and improves quality of life for Indigenous children, it will help Close the Gap by addressing the wider health issues in Indigenous communities; many of those conditions share the same root causes (overcrowding, poor housing conditions, inadequate nutrition and lack of access to healthcare). Healthy children can grow, learn and prosper.

If RHD is not addressed more intensively, Indigenous health outcomes will remain far below that of non-Indigenous Australians.

- Remoteness, transient population, poor living and education standards, high health practitioner turnover, and limited knowledge of the disease all contribute to the persistence of RHD.

Increasing awareness of RHD amongst vulnerable communities and health professionals helps with early diagnosis and prevention, reducing the incidence of RHD.

- *Take Heart: The Quest to Rid Australasia of Rheumatic Heart Disease* is a communications initiative designed to educate at-risk communities and health professionals and elevate RHD as a public health priority. It comprises a one-hour feature film, 14 short films, an action toolkit, two smart phone apps, a website, social media, touring films and photography exhibitions. www.takeheart.tv

Addressing RHD: a 3-step Action Plan

A three-step action plan on RHD will close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians:

1. lock in the gains,
2. accelerate the recovery,
3. secure the future.

Moonshine Films is grateful for the support of our partners in the *Take Heart* film project:



2.

By committing to addressing rheumatic heart disease as a flagship Indigenous health initiative, the Government will escalate its ability to meet its goal of reducing the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and eliminate this disease as a public health priority within five years.

Step 1 – Lock in the gains

Australia is one of only two countries in the world that take a national approach to RHD (along with New Zealand). Collaborative buy-in already exists from key Indigenous and health stakeholders. Vital work is being done in communities through the National Partnership for the rheumatic fever strategy. This must continue, at least at current levels.

ACTION: Maintain current levels of funding to the National Partnership (\$3.1 million a year) for a minimum further three years from 2016 (total Commonwealth investment: \$9.3 million over three years)

ACTION: Maintain current levels of funding to RHD Australia until at least 2022

Step 2 – Accelerate the recovery

The appropriate policy research and medical evidence to support an overarching RHD strategy is already available, but the strategy needs to be fully developed. There is much goodwill and good work, but catalytic impetus is needed to take these efforts to the next level. As well, there is a need to continue and increase practical treatment on the ground while the higher level strategic work is being undertaken. Raising awareness of the disease amongst vulnerable communities and health professionals at the coalface is critical to getting better outcomes, faster. Research shows for every child diagnosed with RHD there is one undiagnosed case. Additional funding is needed to support the control programs in the National Partnership run more effectively, and wider use of low-cost diagnostics like echo-screening may have merit.

ACTION: Address RHD at COAG and secure matching funding contributions from the relevant States/Territories for the National Strategy (total Commonwealth investment \$0, total state/territory investment \$9.3 million over three years)

ACTION: Invest \$0.5 million in a 12-month echo-screening trial in the Northern Territory in 2017, to be rolled out to other jurisdictions in future years (total Commonwealth investment \$0.5 million in 2017)

ACTION: Raise awareness of RHD leveraging the Take Heart campaign to spearhead a locally and culturally relevant awareness program targeting at-risk communities, the health professionals that service them, and the wider Australian public (total Commonwealth investment \$0)

Step 3 – Secure the future

Maximising and building on the existing national approach will materialise Australia's role as a regional and world leader in the fight against RHD (New Zealand's achievements in this field currently outstrip Australia's). But the scope of that work also needs to be widened to include innovations that eliminate and prevent RHD.

ACTION: Accelerate development of an easily-administered, long-acting penicillin for managing RHD

ACTION: Accelerate development of a vaccine for preventing RHD

For more information: www.takeheart.tv or Moonshine Movies 03 9410 4345

STOP PRESS: *Take Heart* wins 9 Awards at the Global Independent Film Awards!

<http://www.globalindependentfilmawards.com/announcements.html>

TAKE HEART WORLD PREMIERE 10 MARCH 2016

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