
TAKE HEART

THE QUEST CONTINUES TO CLOSE THE GAP ON RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE IN AUSTRALIA



[Sydney, 14 March 2019] The award-winning documentary, *Take Heart: The Quest to Rid Australasia of Rheumatic Heart Disease*, will be screening in more than 30 locations across every major Australian state and territory for National *Close The Gap Day*. Hosted by various community organisations, these events commence on 21 March running until mid-April, aim to raise awareness of Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD), a largely invisible disease that threatens the lives of thousands of Indigenous Australians.

Virtually eliminated from the rest of Australia decades ago, RHD is an entirely preventable condition that affects children, particularly those living in rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For many, RHD starts with a sore throat or skin infection, which may advance to heart failure and even death. Two Australians die from this preventable disease each week.

In 2018, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution on RHD requiring countries, like Australia, to completely eliminate this preventable disease. In response, the Take Heart team is working with organisations and groups across Australia to spread the word about RHD by screening their impactful film *Take Heart* in dozens of locations around Australia, continuing to raise awareness of the deadly disease affecting so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. *Take Heart* hopes to raise awareness and education in all communities, creating greater support from politicians to stop unnecessary deaths from this preventable disease.

Since the film's initial release, an inspired series of new videos has been created in first languages that are helping people in remote communities learn more about preventing the disease. The films have also helped decision-makers understand more about this threat and the need to take urgent frontline action.

Take Heart Director Mike Hill said, "Through the upcoming grassroots events across the country we are hoping to shine a light on the remarkable progress that has been made to prevent RHD in Australia through community-led solutions. We also hope to demonstrate to the government the priorities needed to put a stop to RHD."

"*Take Heart* is a powerful tool in the fight against RHD," says Bo Remenyi, the only paediatric cardiologist in the Northern Territory and 2018 NT Australian of the Year. "After children watch these videos, we see more prevention, and children self-identifying their sore throats and skin sores so they can get early treatment. For those who don't know much about RHD, it's a powerful introduction."

Take Heart will be screened at over 30 events in every major state and territory across Australia starting on National *Close The Gap Day* on Thursday 21st March. In attendance will be RHD advocates including Dr Bo Remenyi, NT Australian of the Year (2018); Vicki Wade, Senior Cultural Advisor for RHD Australia; and Edward Liddywo Mardi, RHD Ambassador and star of *Take Heart*.

Access to high res images available on [Dropbox](#).

For more information on this media release please contact: Stephanie Pirrie on E: stephanie.pirrie@gmail.com or M: 0430 517 722

Take Heart | National Screening Dates &

Times Federation Square, Melbourne | Thursday 21 March |
5:30pm Palmerston Events Cinema, Darwin | Thursday 21 March |
7pm

Mercury Cinema, Adelaide | Thursday 21 March | 6:30pm

Bupa Health Foundation, Sydney | Thursday 21 March |

12pm Male Oval, Broome | Thursday 21 March | 9am

Life Without Borders, Rockhampton | Thursday 21 March | 10:45am

Wharf ONE, Cairns Wednesday 27 March | 7pm

Summary of key facts:

- There's a growing grassroots movement to raise awareness of rheumatic heart disease with more than 30 screenings of the award-winning documentary, *Take Heart: The Quest to Rid Australasia of Rheumatic Heart Disease* scheduled over the next few weeks.
- There's a growing number of Indigenous communities seeking more help to find and treat the children in their community affected by RHD.
- In May 2018, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution on RHD requiring member countries, like Australia, to prevent and eliminate RHD.
- Australia now has a bipartisan commitment to eliminate RHD; the ALP passed a resolution at their national conference to prioritise ending RHD on a national level and in February 2019, \$35 million was committed to accelerate a Strep A vaccine.
- Doctors and researchers have discovered that Northern Territory has the highest rates of preventable RHD in the world, with 5% of children being affected by this deadly disease.
- The Northern Territory community is an excellent example of a community-led project taking action to tackle their high rates of rheumatic heart disease. The community has created innovative community-led solutions incorporating traditional language education and Indigenous health workers who can scan hearts locally and communicate easily with local children about prevention.

Talent available for interviews:

Dr Bo Remenyi, Paediatric Cardiologist and 2018 Northern Territory Australian of the Year

Vicki Wade, Senior Cultural Advisor, RHD Australia;

Edward Liddywoo Mardi, RHD Ambassador and star of Take Heart;

Dr Josh Francis, Paediatrician/Infectious Diseases Specialist;

Mike Hill, Director Take Heart.

About Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD)

RHD starts with a sore throat or infected skin sores, symptoms of a common bacterial infection (Group A Streptococcus) in children 5-15 years of age, and if left untreated, can lead to Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) and the permanent heart damage known as Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) which can lead to open-heart surgery, permanent disability, stroke and premature death. Key risk factors include poverty, overcrowding and reduced access to medical care. The global profile of RHD has increased over the past decade but still remains in the shadow of other communicable diseases such as malaria, HIV and TB, despite being the most common acquired form of cardiovascular disease in children, adolescents and young adults in the world, currently affecting over thirty million people globally and 2% of Indigenous Australasians living in the Top End.

About National Close the Gap Day

For the last 10 years many thousands of Australians from every corner of the country, in schools, businesses and community groups, have shown their support for Close the Gap by marking National Close the Gap Day each March. This National Close the Gap Day, we have an opportunity to send our governments a clear message that Australians value health equality as a fundamental right for all. On National Close the Gap Day we encourage you to host an activity in your workplace, home, community or school. Our aim is to bring people together to share information, and most importantly, to take meaningful action in support of achieving Indigenous health equality by 2030.

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