

21 May 2018

HESTA and the Heart Foundation announce a new relationship to help raise awareness of women's heart health

HESTA and the Heart Foundation today announced they are joining forces to help protect the hearts of Australian women.

Heart Foundation National CEO, Adjunct Professor John Kelly, said that together with HESTA they wanted to encourage women to better understand the warning signs of a heart attack and get regular heart health checks with their doctor.

"Heart disease directly accounts for the deaths of about 22 women each day in Australia, and many women are not aware that they are at risk from this silent killer," Prof Kelly said.

HESTA has more than 680,000 members who are women that work in the health and community services sector.

HESTA CEO Debby Blakey said working together with the Heart Foundation was an opportunity to improve health outcomes for Australian women.

"As an industry super fund, we're obviously focused on the financial well-being of our members in retirement but it's much bigger than that. It's really important to also focus on their physical well-being and our members being fit, healthy and well in retirement," Ms Blakey said.

"So, when we heard about the tragic statistics around women and heart disease we were shocked, as I'm sure many people are. We saw an opportunity to have a real impact and hopefully help save lives."

Prof Kelly said partnering with HESTA — a national industry super fund dedicated to health and community services — provided an opportunity to reach more women right around Australia.

"HESTA can help us raise awareness with new audiences and in new ways. A significant number of HESTA members live and work in rural and regional areas, so we want to support them to improve their heart health and wellbeing, and encourage other women to do likewise," he said.

Prof Kelly noted that heart disease was often seen as a predominantly male disease, with only 3 in 10 women recognising heart disease as personally relevant.

"This perception has had a significant impact on heart health outcomes for women," Prof Kelly said.

"Women often don't recognise the warning signs of a heart attack and are generally slower to seek help. Subsequent delays in their diagnosis and treatment lead to worse survival and recovery rates compared to men."

"We also know that women are more likely to look after their loved ones' health than their own. This is a belief we need to change, women can only look after others if they look after themselves first."

The new relationship will also focus on reducing the impact of smoking and tobacco products on the health of Australians.

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HESTA has a tobacco exclusion across its entire portfolio of investments and was one of the first Australian super funds to sign the Investor Statement on Tobacco, encouraging other investors to acknowledge this global issue.

"We know our members see first-hand the terrible impact that smoking has on the lives of the people they care for and the health system more broadly," Ms Blakey said.

"HESTA has a portfolio-wide exclusion on companies that manufacture cigarettes and tobacco products. So, if your super is with HESTA, it's not with tobacco."

Prof Kelly said that while smoking rates had fallen significantly over the last few decades, it still remains a leading risk to the health of many Australians, with smoking contributing to the loss of 15,000 lives each year.

"While we know that smoking increases the risk of coronary heart disease for both genders, a number of studies have shown that women who smoke have an increased risk of coronary heart disease compared to men," Prof Kelly said.

"The reasons for the increased risk are not fully known but hormones, the use of the contraceptive pill and inadequate physical activity leave women who do smoke more vulnerable to heart, lung and blood vessel disease. Australia has done a good job in driving smoking rates down – but there is room to do better."

HESTA

*HESTA is an industry superannuation fund that for more than 30 years has been dedicated to those working in the Health and Community Services sector. HESTA has over **850,000** members and manages more than **\$44 billion** of members' assets. Please note HESTA is an acronym and should be capitalised.*

Heart Foundation

The Heart Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to fighting the single biggest killer of Australians – heart disease. For close to 60 years, it's led the battle to save lives and improve the heart health of all Australians. Its sights are set on a world where people don't suffer or die prematurely because of heart disease. To find out more about the Heart Foundation's research program or to make a donation, visit www.heartfoundation.org.au or call 13 11 12.

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