



## **The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP**

**Minister for Aged Care  
Minister for Indigenous Health  
Member for Hasluck**

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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#### **World-first study reveals early heart disease risk for First Nations people**

Ground-breaking research promises to lead to improved heart attack and stroke prevention among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Releasing the Australian National University (ANU) study today, Minister for Indigenous Health Ken Wyatt AM said it found up to half of older First Nations people were at high risk of cardiovascular disease but that significant numbers of people aged in their 20s were also at risk.

“Recognising the risk will help save and improve lives and contribute to Closing the Gap in life expectancy,” Minister Wyatt said.

“Heart checks may need to start earlier in order to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but the good news is most heart attacks and strokes can be prevented.

“Critical to this is knowing who is at risk and encouraging lifestyle changes, including quitting smoking, and lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

“The study also found that many people at high risk of heart attacks or strokes are not aware of it and most are not receiving currently recommended therapy to lower their cholesterol.”

The study was funded through a \$550,000 National Health and Medical Research Council grant.

“This study is a world first for a First Nations population, combining data on major risk factors to calculate the likelihood of future heart attacks and strokes,” Minister Wyatt said.

“Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high rates of cardiovascular disease, with the rate of hospitalisation for coronary heart disease up to eight times that for other Australians.”

Currently, most clinical guidelines recommend heart checks for First Australians from the age of 35.

The ANU’s Professor Emily Banks, who led the study *Absolute cardiovascular disease risk and lipid-lowering therapy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, said the research involved 2,800 First Australians from across the country.

“The study provides us with reliable firsthand information that doing more screening to identify people at high risk of heart attacks and strokes, along with appropriate management, is necessary and we know that will save lives,” Professor Banks said.

Minister Wyatt said the study would feed in to a related ANU project that had been supported by a \$2.4 million investment from the Turnbull Government.

“Current national guidelines for cardiovascular disease risk assessment recommend all First Nations people aged 35 and over have a heart check,” Minister Wyatt said.

“This new research suggests we should broaden our focus to include a whole-of-life approach to heart health, to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive the best preventive care for cardiovascular disease.”

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Authorised by Ken Wyatt AM, MP, Member for Hasluck