

## **Media Release**

### **Chiefs of Staff, News Directors**

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### **Menzies warns against ‘disease fatigue’ in the support of cardiovascular research**

Australian cardiovascular (CVD) specialists are today warning against apathy toward CVD research in light of an apparent ‘disease fatigue’ that has robbed the sector of funding momentum.

Speaking on behalf of the sector, the Director of the University of Tasmania’s Menzies Institute for Medical Research, Professor Tom Marwick, said there was a mistaken view that cardiovascular diseases had by and large been addressed, and that all that could be done had been done to curtail their impact and alleviate patient suffering.

“This is a dangerous myth that perpetuates a sense of false comfort for the community. The likelihood of developing heart failure at some stage of life is more than 20 per cent for all Australians. As the population ages, we are seeing new cardiovascular epidemics – aortic valve disease and atrial fibrillation – that are increasing, unchecked.

“We’ve made good headway toward reducing the rates of stroke and heart attack, aided by declining rates of smoking. However, the underlying trends show that three in 10 Australian deaths are due to circulatory diseases, and coronary heart disease remains the leading cause of death in Australia.”

In response to the funding crisis in cardiovascular diseases, a national alliance of high-profile researchers and peak bodies has today launched the Australian Cardiovascular Alliance (ACvA). The ACvA aims to be Australia’s peak leadership body for the advancement of research into heart, stroke and vascular disease and will lobby as a united voice to advocate for critical attention. The Menzies Institute for Medical Research, together with five other institutes with a major interest in cardiovascular research, is a founding member of the Alliance.

Research is critical to better prevention, diagnosis and early treatment. In Tasmania, Menzies has a state-wide project aiming to prevent heart failure, and others targeted

to avoidance of hospital re-admission with heart failure, as well as improving control of blood pressure.

But despite clear analysis showing that heart and vessel disease provides returns on research investment greater than any other major disease burden, this sector consistently receives proportionately less support from philanthropic and public sectors. From 2008 – 2013, the proportion of NHMRC funding to CVD research hovered around 14.5 per cent of overall national health research funding. This is about half the research funding directed towards cancer research, despite the fact that cardiovascular disease continues to kill more Australians than all cancers combined.

Professor Marwick said heart and vessel disease was responsible for about \$15 billion in the national health expenditure and this was projected to rise sharply over the next two decades with the rising incidence of obesity and diabetes.

“Stroke alone costs Australia \$5 billion a year. Our most vulnerable tend to be worst affected such that the poor, the elderly, our Indigenous people are all groups with the highest rates of hospitalisation and death from these diseases,” he said.

“Menzies will be encouraging ACvA to press for greater cardiovascular research funding from Federal and State governments, as well as the Heart Foundation. We can’t keep doing the same – we need new discoveries to help the fight against cardiovascular disease.”

Speaking on behalf of the alliance, the Founding Chairman, Professor Jaye Chin-Dusting said; “Among researchers and health professionals, there is deep concern about the capacity crisis in CVD research due to the lack of growth in peer-reviewed funding, combined with a lack of alternative funding available to other disease groups. We’re seeing a real sense of ‘disease fatigue’ from funders.”

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