

## F.A.S.T.

### An investment in targeted stroke education for regional Queensland.

- › The Queensland Government has an opportunity to firmly embed the life-saving F.A.S.T. (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) message in regional communities, and ensure as many residents as possible understand the importance of calling triple zero (000) immediately at the first sign of stroke.
- › This year there will be more than 5,000 first-time strokes in Queensland.<sup>1</sup> Many of these will be experienced by those living in regional areas of the state.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is predicted that by 2050 of the Federal electorates with the highest rates of stroke in Australia, 5 of the top 10 will be in Queensland, and 4 of these will be in regional Queensland.<sup>1</sup>
- › Regional Australians are 19 percent more likely to suffer a stroke than those in metropolitan areas<sup>1</sup>, and are also more likely to die, or be left with an ongoing disability as a result of a stroke, because of limited access to diagnosis and treatment.
- › Stroke Foundation applauds the Queensland Government's ongoing commitment to the prevention of chronic disease, including stroke, and support of Queensland health professionals in the delivery of best-practice stroke care through the translation of registry data into improved quality, safety and health outcomes. We are proud to be partnering with the Queensland Government to deliver the *My Health for Life* and *StrokeLink* programs.
- › Stroke Foundation, through its delivery of the Federal Government funded *Living Well After Stroke* program, is contributing to a more sustainable Queensland health system, ensuring survivors of stroke in our state are empowered to stay well and lessen their risk of developing further strokes.
- › **Together we can build on the solid foundation that has been established, maximising the value of the Government's significant investment, and giving**

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regional Queenslanders the best possible chance of surviving, and living well after stroke.

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## Targeted F.A.S.T. (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) Community Education Program in regional Queensland to reduce stroke and speed up treatment.

**Investment:** \$130,000 per annum over three years.



**Stroke is a time-critical illness, and faster diagnosis and treatment saves lives and results in improved quality of life. When someone suffers a stroke, every minute counts. F.A.S.T. access to treatment means a greater chance of recovery and decreased costs for our health system.**

Internationally, a dramatic reduction (as much as 80 percent in some countries) in the number of acute stroke admissions during the current COVID-19 pandemic, compared to the same period in 2019, has been observed.<sup>2</sup> Anecdotal evidence indicates a similar pattern in Australia. This is likely due to patients not wishing to overburden the hospital system or fearing infection with COVID-19 if they are referred to hospital.

It is critical residents in regional Queensland understand if they or someone they know experiences the signs of stroke, including facial drooping, arm weakness, or speech changes, they must call triple zero (000) immediately.

**The F.A.S.T. Community Education Program has been developed and is ready to be rolled out in regional Queensland.**

Central to the program is recruiting, training and providing support to local volunteers to raise awareness in the community about stroke, including the signs of stroke, and chronic disease prevention. Through the compelling voice of those impacted by stroke, we will increase knowledge and help to ensure patients get to hospital in the critical time window for life-saving stroke treatment.

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## Rationale

**Only 37 percent of Queensland stroke patients arrive at hospital within the 4.5 hour window for clot-dissolving treatment (thrombolysis).<sup>3</sup>**

There is a lack of awareness in the community about stroke and the need for it to be treated as a medical emergency.

A recent Stroke Foundation study of awareness of the signs of stroke among Queenslanders, found that unprompted<sup>4</sup>:

- 41 percent knew facial drooping was a sign.
- 9 percent knew an inability to lift both arms was a sign.
- 51 percent knew speech difficulties were a sign.

## The program

Stroke Foundation currently has 19 volunteer speakers in Queensland who are trained and ready to deliver community talks, including 8 in regional areas. In the last 12 months, this group has delivered 49 StrokeSafe talks across the state. Importantly, in 2020 and 2021, StrokeSafe talks in Queensland have been impacted by COVID-19. In the last year pre-COVID-19, 2019, 30 StrokeSafe talks were delivered by 15 volunteer speakers in regional Queensland alone.

With the support of the Queensland Government, this pool of volunteers will be expanded, enabling more targeted talks to be delivered across regional areas of the state, and more community members to be empowered to live well.

In addition to delivering StrokeSafe talks, volunteers will set up displays and activities at community events and in health settings across regional Queensland, and distribute F.A.S.T. collateral (bookmarks, fridge magnets, wallet cards and 'Understand and Prevent Stroke' booklets), gain local workplace support, and engage local media, which will facilitate improved awareness about the signs of stroke and dispatches of ambulances. This work will strengthen the work of Health and Wellbeing Queensland.

An online community education campaign will also be run, and F.A.S.T. digital marketing resources will be created for roll-out on YouTube, and other social media channels, including Facebook and Instagram. We know that regional Queensland has many areas of significant disadvantage, where a high proportion of residents suffer from key risk factors for many chronic diseases, including stroke. As such, we will be able to specifically geo-target these vulnerable populations in our online campaign, using the Social Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) measure.

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## Evaluation

An evaluation plan will be developed to produce a report on the outcomes at the end of the project, with monitoring throughout for continuous improvement. Precise measures will be devised at the commencement of the project, and could include:

- › Improved recall of the signs of stroke test – F.A.S.T.
- › Number of people reached by the program broken down SEIFA.
- › Improved health literacy, and awareness of healthy behaviours for stroke, and other chronic disease prevention.
- › Number of F.A.S.T. resources delivered.
- › Number of StrokeSafe presentations delivered, events attended, and audience size.

## Proven success

F.A.S.T. community education campaigns are proven to directly result in increased awareness of the signs of stroke and calls to emergency services nationally<sup>5</sup> and internationally.<sup>6</sup>

Evaluation of volunteer stroke education programs demonstrate they have a significant impact. These programs also aim to encourage people to be more motivated to change their behaviour with regard to stroke health, and to visit their GP in relation to any concerns about stroke risk factors.

Similar programs funded by State Governments are currently being delivered in Tasmania, Western Australia, and New South Wales, and are showing positive results. For example, a recent Stroke Foundation study of awareness of the signs of stroke found that Tasmania, where the F.A.S.T. Community Education program has been delivered since 2019, had the highest unprompted awareness of the signs of stroke, compared with all other states and territories.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in New South Wales, where the F.A.S.T. Community Education program is being delivered in regional communities, 42 percent of participants from regional areas knew at least two of the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke, compared with only 24 percent of participants from Sydney.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the Federal Government funded F.A.S.T. campaign in 2013–14, delivered by the Stroke Foundation, it was found that among the target audience<sup>5</sup>:

- › **39 percent** of people recognised F.A.S.T. in relation to stroke (up from 35 percent) among the target audience.
- › **87 percent** of people could recognise one or more signs of stroke.

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- **Three in four people (76 percent)** would call an ambulance if a stroke was suspected.

These results are also reflected internationally. In New Zealand, calls to emergency services increased by 32 percent while the F.A.S.T campaign was being delivered<sup>6</sup>, and in the United Kingdom calls increased by 78 percent.<sup>7</sup>

There is a social and economic benefit to be derived from increased awareness of stroke signs. Better awareness means more people getting to hospital in time for life saving treatment, and ultimately less death and disability from stroke. A systematic review and meta-analysis published in *The Lancet* has found for every 1,000 patients who receive clot-dissolving treatment up to six hours after stroke, approximately 100 more will be alive and independent than if they had not received treatment.<sup>8</sup> A 2016 evaluation of the F.A.S.T. campaign in the United Kingdom showed a 28:1 return on marketing investment, which included benefits to the state and a decrease in care costs.<sup>7</sup>

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## About the Stroke Foundation

The Stroke Foundation is a national charity that partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting stroke survivors.

## Contacts

Monique Devereux

Stroke Foundation National Manager, Public Affairs and Media

Ph: 0433 731 974

E: [mdevereux@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:mdevereux@strokefoundation.org.au)

Andrea Sanders

Stroke Foundation State Manager, Queensland and Northern Territory

Ph: 0400 093 275

E: [asanders@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:asanders@strokefoundation.org.au)