

Press Release

22 September 2025

The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA to commemorate World Heart Day

The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSFSA) is in its 45th year dedicating its mission to reducing cardiovascular (CV) conditions. Every year on World Heart Day, 29 September, the Foundation joins the global initiative that brings together individuals, families, communities, non-government organizations and governments to take meaningful action for heart health, both their own and that of others. This year marks the 25th anniversary of World Heart Day as initiated by the World Heart Federation (WHF), highlighting the continuous need for heart health awareness due to the fact that nearly 18 million die from CV conditions every year. Our CEO, Prof Pamela Naidoo reminds us that one in five people will die prematurely from cardiovascular disease, which claims more lives than cancer and chronic respiratory diseases combined. The WHF along with its membership mobilizes during the campaign to unite people across borders and cultures in the fight to reduce and prevent cardiovascular disease (CVD).

This year, the Foundation's month-long Heart Awareness Month (HAM) campaign culminates on World Heart Day, using the WHF's 2025 theme: **"Don't Miss a Beat."** The theme underscores the urgent message that every heartbeat matters, calling for collective efforts to protect heart health and expand access to life-saving care. Through this campaign, the HSFSA, a member of the WHF, aims to inspire South Africans to take charge of their circulatory health and advocate for equitable healthcare for all. The Foundation is dedicated to advocating for policies that create supportive environments that empower and enable South Africans to make decisions that protect their heart health. We, along with our fellow WHF members, believe that heart health is not a privilege, it is a fundamental health right and an essential part of achieving health equity and justice worldwide.

The Foundation implements programmes that operationalize the advocacy pillars of CVD. Our programmes speak to health promotion, early detection and linkage to care through community-based health screenings for blood pressure, blood sugar, and body mass index (BMI). These indicators, if found outside the normal range, are recognised as leading risk factors for CVD. The Foundation not only emphasizes the importance of heart disease prevention, but also the critical role of cardiothoracic interventions and medication availability and accessibility in saving lives. According to the WHF, cities are missing opportunities to boost health and reduce illness burdens. By increasing treatment for high blood pressure from 1 in 5 people to 1 in 2, we could potentially prevent 130 million premature deaths globally. Advances in procedures such as coronary bypass surgery, valve repairs, heart transplant surgery and minimally invasive cardiac surgeries have drastically improved survival rates for patients with severe heart conditions. This highlights the need for awareness of organ donation and the role it plays in improving the quality of life for those in urgent need.

Heart disease is preventable, and adopting healthy behaviours can make a notable difference to CVD reduction. Adopting a balanced diet, rich in fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats contributes to heart disease prevention. These nutrient-dense foods provide essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support cardiovascular health. By reducing salt, unhealthy fats, sugar, and ultra-processed foods, individuals can help lower their blood pressure and cholesterol levels, significantly reducing their risk of heart disease. A balanced diet can also aid in maintaining a

healthy weight, improving insulin sensitivity, and reducing inflammation, all of which are critical factors in preventing heart disease. While eating healthy is important, knowing your genetic risk is also vital. It's equally important to incorporate regular exercise and other heart-healthy habits into our daily routines. Every bite counts, and every choice can bring you closer to a healthier heart.

As important as what we eat is, so is the air that we breathe. Quitting smoking, vaping and other tobacco-products is a crucial step towards improving heart health. The benefits are immediate, with blood pressure and heart rate beginning to normalize within 20 minutes of quitting. Cessation of smoking benefits not only the individual, but also those in the immediate surroundings, as second hand smoke poses significant health risks to bystanders. In South Africa, strengthening the enforcement of smoke-free public spaces can play a crucial role in reducing exposure to second-hand smoke and promoting a healthier environment for all. With sustained, collective efforts and positive shifts in behaviour, even small actions can significantly slow the current rise in premature deaths caused by heart disease. Stand with us and the tobacco consortium to drive the passing of the Tobacco Bill and EVDs into law.

Another leading risk factor for cardiovascular diseases is sedentary behaviour which is largely also the most common cause of obesity. According to WHO, 31% of adults worldwide were reported to not have met the recommended levels for physical activity in 2022. Regular physical activity, such as brisk walking or cycling, has been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular events by improving cardiac function and metabolic health. Despite this, urbanisation, excessive digital habits and reduced access to safe recreational spaces continue to hinder active living. On World Heart Day, it is crucial to raise awareness about the importance of integrating movement into daily routines to protect heart health and enhance overall well-being.

Prof Naidoo states that managing psychological stress is a critical component of maintaining heart health. Chronic cumulative stress may have a significant impact on the cardiovascular system, raising blood pressure, contributing to anxiety and depression, and increasing the risk of heart disease. Managing psychological stress after you have been diagnosed is also important for maintaining health outcomes. However, simple techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, and spending time outdoors or with loved ones can significantly improve mental wellbeing and reduce cardiovascular strain, helping to lower blood pressure, improve mood, and enhance overall wellbeing, ultimately reducing the risk of heart disease.

Prof Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the HSFSa states that, "Heart health is a shared responsibility. By making informed choices today, through healthy habits and active living, we can reduce the impact of cardiovascular disease and build a healthier future for all. By prioritizing heart health through healthy habits, psychological stress management, managing chronic medical conditions and making informed choices, we can take control of our cardiovascular health status and reduce the risk of heart disease", concludes Prof Naidoo. Join and support the HSFSa, a health non-profit to implement the programmes that improve cardiovascular health in South Africa, the region and globally. On the continent, the HSFSa continues to work with the African Heart Network and other professional and scientific bodies.

For media enquiries, please contact Themba Mzondi, PR and Communications Officer on 021 422 1586 / 078 113 5216 or email themba.mzondi@heartfoundation.co.za. Media engagement will be carried out by the CEO, Health Promotion and Health Risk Assessment Officers and Allied Health Care staff, such as Dietitians.

About the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) plays a leading role in the fight against preventable heart disease and stroke, with the aim of seeing fewer people in South Africa suffer premature deaths and disabilities. The HSFSA, established in 1980 is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which relies on external funding to sustain the work it carries out.

The HSFSA aims to reduce the cardiovascular disease (CVD) burden in South Africa and ultimately on the health care system of South Africa. Our mission is to empower people in South Africa to adopt healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices easier, seek appropriate care and encourage prevention.

For more information visit www.heartfoundation.co.za. You can also find us on www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA and www.x.com/SAHeartStroke



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