

Media Release

Wollongong Workshop Tackles Growing Heart Health Disparities Between Rural and Urban Australia

On September 5th, a landmark workshop at the University of Wollongong's Innovation Campus brought together an influential group of doctors, researchers, patients, and health leaders from across Australia to address the widening disparities in heart and stroke health outcomes between rural and urban communities.

The workshop focused on Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), one of the leading causes of death in Australia. Despite improvements in primary prevention and acute care- CAD remains the biggest killer of both women and men with one Australian having a heart attack every 9 minutes.

Organised by the Australian Cardiovascular Alliance (ACvA) and supported by Amgen and Novartis, the event attracted a broad range of experts from the Illawarra region and beyond all dedicated to identifying the key drivers behind CAD disparities in regional Australia and exploring innovative, measurable solutions to close the gap.

Among the voices was Wollongong resident Peter Goddard, who shared his personal experience of accessing heart health services in the Illawarra area. Despite having no apparent symptoms, he was diagnosed with a severe arterial blockage, requiring an urgent stent. "You could be at high risk for a heart attack without even knowing it," he said. "Without a vigilant GP and access to an angiogram, I might not have been so lucky."

Healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers at the workshop pointed to significant barriers faced by regional communities in accessing critical heart health services. Local clinicians cited extended waiting times, a shortage of specialists, a lack of permanent staff, and financial barriers to care and medications as compounding factors in these disparities.

ACvA CEO Kerry Doyle PSM OAM, also a Wollongong resident, underscored her organisation's commitment to uniting the cardiovascular and stroke research sectors to collaboratively address these challenges. "Having Local Health Districts, Primary Health Networks, state and federal governments, alongside industry, pharmacy, general practice, nursing, cardiology, and consumer representatives all in the same room allowed us to begin these vital conversations. It's about connecting the different parts of the system to pinpoint where improvements can be made."

The workshop concluded with a strong commitment from all stakeholders to continue collaborating on practical solutions that will improve CAD outcomes in regional Australia. The collaborative efforts sparked by events such as this one are expected to drive future research and healthcare initiatives that will benefit communities across the country.