

WA MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Almost two in five West Australians with an irregular heartbeat experience four or more symptoms before visiting a doctor: new research shows**

**Experts championing greater heart health awareness, education and action**

Almost two in five (37%) West Australians aged 50 and above living with the most common, sustained heart rhythm disorder – atrial fibrillation (AF)<sup>1-3</sup> – wait until experiencing four or more symptoms before seeking medical advice, new research reveals.<sup>4</sup>

More than half a million Australians (>54,000 West Australians) have AF<sup>5</sup> – a lifelong, progressive disease<sup>6</sup> where faulty electrical signals of the heart cause the top chambers of the heart known as the atria, to beat faster, erratically,<sup>7,8</sup> and out of rhythm with the heart's lower two chambers [the ventricles].<sup>3</sup> Other AF symptoms include chest tightness, fatigue, shortness of breath and dizziness,<sup>6,9</sup> noting 30% to 40% of those affected may show no symptoms at all.<sup>10</sup>

According to Cardiologist and Electrophysiologist, Queensland Cardiovascular Group, Dr Tomos Walters, Brisbane, the burden and prevalence of this serious, life-compromising disease<sup>4,11</sup> is often underestimated because many (30% - 40%) may not display visible symptoms, which makes diagnosis challenging.<sup>1</sup>

"While many Australian adults claim to understand various factors affecting their heart health,<sup>4</sup> concerningly, the new research reveals 34% wait until experiencing four or more AF symptoms before seeking medical advice.<sup>4</sup>

"The underestimation of disease prevalence,<sup>1</sup> combined with low community awareness,<sup>4</sup> and 30% to 40% of patients showing no obvious AF symptoms,<sup>10</sup> is creating the "perfect storm" for one of the largest, and most pressing public health epidemics,"<sup>12-14</sup> said Dr Walters.

"Furthermore, AF cases in those aged 55 and above years are projected to double over the next two decades,<sup>1</sup> driven by our ageing population and rising rates of excess weight and obesity.<sup>10</sup>

"People living with AF face a threefold increased risk of heart failure, nearly five times the likelihood of having a stroke, and double the risk of developing dementia,"<sup>10,15</sup> Dr Walters said.

"Early diagnosis and intervention is therefore crucial for effective management<sup>16</sup> and reducing the risk of these potentially life-threatening complications."<sup>10,15</sup>

The new research reveals almost one in five (19%) West Australians living with AF report a 'moderate to severe' decline in their quality of life and, ability to perform daily activities.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, only 25% feel motivated to pursue a more proactive approach to their heart health, even after learning about the heightened risk of stroke, underscoring the urgent need for greater community education and awareness of AF.<sup>4</sup>

"AF affects patients physically, but also seems to have a psychological impact. The new AF consumer research reveals more than three-quarters (77%) of Australians living with AF, or its symptoms, report feeling 'anxious' or 'worried', with 13% experiencing 'severe' anxiety due to the chronic disease,"<sup>4</sup> said Specialist Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Clinical Lead of the Ventricular Tachycardia Service, Fiona Stanley Hospital; and Senior Lecturer, University of Western Australia, Dr Ben King, Perth.

"Studies show depression or anxiety can be associated with worse patient perception of AF symptoms, reduce quality of life, and maybe even increase the likelihood of AF recurrence.<sup>17</sup>

"Even though we don't fully understand it, there is a complex link between mental and emotional stress and how the heart functions, with studies suggesting anxiety may have a role in triggering heart rhythm abnormalities, like AF.<sup>18</sup> This is yet another reason to improve disease awareness and a proactive approach to detection and diagnosis," said Dr King.

"While physical inactivity is also an indirect risk factor for AF, which is troubling considering the new research reveals many (nearly 72%) of those living with the disease report it affects their ability to exercise,<sup>4</sup> which may make the problem worse.

"It is crucial for all Australians aged 50 and above to stay active. Regular physical activity may significantly reduce the burden of AF, lower the risk of heart disease, and better manage other health problems,"<sup>19-21</sup> Dr King said.

Despite many Australians regularly monitoring their heart health<sup>4</sup> – through blood pressure checks (58%), electrocardiograms (41%), and heart auscultations [listening for an abnormal heart beat] (34%)<sup>4</sup> – one in three (31%) still feel unsure about recognising heart-related symptoms and when to seek medical advice.<sup>4</sup>

CEO and Founder of the national heart disease advocacy group, [hearts4heart](#), Tanya Hall, Perth, said her personal experience with AF inspired her to create an organisation dedicated to raising awareness of the disease, and ensuring patients are educated about available treatments.

"It was through my own experience of living with heart disease and AF all of my life, that ultimately led me to start hearts4heart.

"When I was in my late teens, I started experiencing symptoms of AF. A missed diagnosis at the age of 17, meant I continued to live with my condition progressively worsening over the next 10 years," said Tanya.

"AF took a significant toll on my life. When I was really unwell, I was either in hospital, or had hospital in the home. AF affected my ability to work, socialise, and my mental health.

"With timely diagnosis, supportive networks, and the right treatment however, I've been able to live well with AF, and lead a fulfilling life," Tanya said.

"However, awareness of AF remains alarmingly low among the general population, including the elderly, despite one in 10 (9%) of those aged 80 and above living with the disease.<sup>10</sup>

"When most people think of heart disease, they think of a 'heart attack', but many are unaware of other heart conditions," said Tanya.

"This reinforces the urgent need for increased awareness, better patient education, and a proactive approach to heart health."

To learn more about the symptoms, management and treatment of AF, visit your doctor, or head to: [www.beatafib.com.au](http://www.beatafib.com.au).

**About Antenna market research**

Boston Scientific commissioned Antenna to perform an online, quantitative survey on atrial fibrillation (AF), involving a nationally representative sample of 1,015 Australians aged 50+ years between January 7 to 12, 2025.<sup>1</sup> The data was weighted by age and gender to reflect the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population estimates.

Boston Scientific Pty Ltd, PO Box 332 Botany NSW 1455 Australia. Tel +61 2 8063 8100.

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## AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

EXPERTS	
<b>Dr Ben King</b>	Specialist Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist; Clinical Lead of the Ventricular Tachycardia Service, Fiona Stanley Hospital; and Senior Lecturer, University of Western Australia, <b>PERTH</b>
<b>Dr Tomos Walters</b>	Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Queensland Cardiovascular Group, <b>BRISBANE</b>
<b>Dr Ben Hunt</b>	Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Pindara Private Hospital, <b>GOLD COAST</b>
<b>A/Prof Raymond Sy</b>	Cardiologist; Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Concord Hospital, and Mater Hospital; Director of Arrhythmia Service; and Clinical Associate Professor, University of Sydney, <b>SYDNEY</b>
<b>Dr Ihab El-Sokkari</b>	Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology Services, Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Nepean Public and Private Hospitals and Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney, <b>SYDNEY</b>
<b>Dr Emily Kotschet</b>	Cardiologist and Cardiac Electrophysiologist, Monash Heart, Holmesglen Private Hospital, Cabrini Hospital, Mulgrave Private Hospital and St John of God Berwick Hospital, <b>MELBOURNE</b>
<b>Dr Christian Verdicchio</b>	CEO, Heart Support Australia, Clinician-researcher & Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney & University of Adelaide, <b>ADELAIDE</b>
PATIENT ADVOCACY GROUP REPRESENTATIVE	
<b>Tanya Hall</b>	Founder and CEO of hearts4heart living well with AF, <b>PERTH</b>
AUSTRALIANS WITH EXPERIENCE OF AF	
<b>Justine, 53</b>	Triple cancer survivor, Multiple Sclerosis advocate, award-winning international keynote speaker, mother and grandmother living with AF, <b>GEELONG</b>
<b>Tom, 78</b>	Former real estate agent, father and grandfather living with AF, <b>MELBOURNE</b>
<b>Gai, 72</b>	Retired pharmacist and business owner, mother and grandmother living with AF, <b>MELBOURNE</b>
<b>Andrew, 59</b>	Business owner, soccer player and stepfather to two whose symptoms of AF were triggered by emotional trauma, <b>SYDNEY</b>
<b>Gregory, 59</b>	Water quality technician, father of two, and car enthusiast diagnosed with AF following a workplace accident, <b>BATHURST</b>
<b>Graeme, 55</b>	Father-of-two, government infrastructure executive and sportsman alerted to symptoms of AF by his smartwatch, <b>BRISBANE</b>
<b>Elaine, 81</b>	Avid gardener and former seamstress alerted to symptoms of AF via her smartwatch, <b>BRISBANE</b>
<b>Don, 49</b>	Former cosmetic dentist, avid tennis player and father-to-three alerted to symptoms of AF via a smartwatch, <b>GOLD COAST</b>
<b>Kristy, 44</b>	Mother to one, housekeeper and motorbike enthusiast who first experienced symptoms of AF during labour, <b>GAWLER, SA</b>
<b>Tanya Hall</b>	Developed symptoms of AF in her teens, now living well with AF, <b>PERTH</b>

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<b>MEDIA CONTACTS</b>	<p><b>Kirsten Bruce &amp; Mel Kheradi, VIVA! Communications</b></p> <p><b>T 02 9968 3741   1604</b></p> <p><b>M 0401 717 566   0421 551 257</b></p> <p><b>E <a href="mailto:kirstenbruce@vivacommunications.com.au">kirstenbruce@vivacommunications.com.au</a>   <a href="mailto:mel@vivacommunications.com.au">mel@vivacommunications.com.au</a></b></p>

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