

**Tuesday 14 July 2026**

## **Australian researchers lead global push to transform cardiac rehabilitation from short term to life long**

Australian researchers are leading a global push to transform how people recover after a heart attack, shifting from short-term cardiac rehabilitation to lifelong heart health support.

A major new international roadmap published this week in *Nature Reviews Cardiology* and led by Australian researcher and former Heart Foundation fellow, Professor Julie Redfern, of Bond University in Gold Coast, calls for a fundamental rethink of care for people living with cardiovascular disease.

The new roadmap, an initiative of the World Heart Federation, proposes reimagining ‘cardiac rehabilitation’ with a broader focus as ‘cardiovascular health programs’.

These programs emphasise lifelong care, helping people manage their condition, reduce their risk factors, and living well while also preventing future events.

People who have a heart event are more likely to have a second event in the following years. While medical advances mean more people survive heart attacks and other events, many are left without long-term support to stay healthy.

### **A new roadmap that focuses on lifelong care**

Prof. Redfern said traditional cardiac rehabilitation programmes typically last several weeks and aren’t always attended by patients.

“Data shows that fewer than one in three eligible patients accept referral, and even fewer complete them,” she said.

“It’s quite clear that this model no longer reflects the reality of living with cardiovascular disease.”

Data released last week by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that deaths from coronary heart disease (CHD) had reduced by 18 percent between 2015 and 2024. Yet the number of people with CHD remained high, particularly in regional and remote areas of Australia.

# Media release



“With more people now living with cardiovascular disease as opposed to dying from it, people need ongoing support across their lifetime, not just a short-term program to recover from a heart event,” Prof Redfern said.

The work is backed by global evidence, including a survey of clinicians and experts across 50 countries and input from international leaders at a global forum in London. It builds on the NHMRC-funded SOLVE-CHD program of research and cardiac rehabilitation transformation.

A second companion paper published in *Global Heart*, led by Heart Foundation-funded clinician researcher Dr Dion Candelaria, of University of Sydney, this week outlines how these changes can be implemented in real-world settings including hospitals, community health services and national health systems.

“Australian progress is identified as an exemplar case study for upskilling clinicians and supporting reform” Dr Candelaria said.

Heart Foundation Chief Medical and Science Officer, Prof. Derek Chew, welcomed the research and said the shift to a more proactive and lifelong model of support could improve outcomes for millions of people worldwide and reduce pressure on health systems.

“Heart disease doesn’t end when a patient leaves hospital,” Prof Chew said.

“This is about supporting people to live well for the rest of their lives. Not just to survive but also thrive.”

## **Patients encouraged to take up local programs**

Prof. Chew said the need for longer term care was at the core of the Heart Foundation’s own program, *My Heart My Life*, which has to date supported more than 7,000 people in Australia to live better quality lives while managing their cardiovascular risk of a repeat event.

“The Heart Foundation’s *My Heart My Life* program is an example of a program which can support long term care, benefiting patients months or even years after their heart event,” Prof. Chew said.

“It consists of an initial three-month program followed by ongoing community connection with other patients in a private, Heart Foundation-moderated social media group.

# Media release



"The program helps people manage their condition day to day - including advice on medicines, being active, eating well and looking after mental health."

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