



Heartbeat Victoria

Heartbeat Happenings Winter 2026



Heartbeat Victoria Council Inc.

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BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

President: Christine Rees

Vice President: Barry Nixon

Secretary: Vivien Williamson

Treasurer: David Stella

Board Members: John Allen; Elaine Gregory;
Dr Jennifer Irvine; Professor Andrew Murphy;
Professor Rebecca Ritchie

VISION: Every individual and family affected by heart disease has access to a compassionate community, vital resources and the highest quality of care, enabling them to live empowered heart-healthy lives.

MISSION: To foster an active, compassionate and inclusive peer support network in Victoria for individuals and families affected by all forms of heart disease and heart-related health issues.

Through our community driven groups, we provide emotional support, share information, advocate for better health outcomes and raise funds for cardiac equipment and improved cardiac care.

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A Message from the President

With winter approaching, immunisations help lower the risk of serious flu or COVID complications. Staying healthy also means maintaining good diet, sleep, and exercise. Even when winter makes

activity less appealing, it prepares us for spring. Please look after your health at this, often tricky, time of year.

We are delighted to have Dr. Jen Irvine join our Board. She offers extensive experience in cardiology from various viewpoints. We look forward to benefiting from Jen's expertise, while providing a meaningful volunteer experience.

Professor Rebecca spoke at the South Gippsland Branch lunch in April, sharing her family history of heart disease and insights from her pharmacology career. She engaged over 60 attendees in relation to heart health, and prompted enthusiastic participation. Janne Grenon and the Heartbeat team hosted a BBQ and salad lunch for guests, including Councillor John Kennedy, local media, and Senior Citizens. Thanks to all who helped make the event so successful.

Congratulations and thanks to Ballarat member's Leigh Miller and Alan Bell who attended the Bendigo Wellness Expo on May 7th. John Allen had done much of the preparation work, but was unable to attend at the last minute. This left Leigh and Allen, who ran the table with energy and information. This being my first effort, I was very grateful to have their support and coaching. Thanks to Leigh and Allen for being so generous with their time and energy and for packing up while I headed to my next appointment.

Heartbeat thrives on members supporting and sharing with one another. By working together - as members, branches, and with the Board - we are making progress in addressing heart disease challenges.

Christine Rees



New Board Member

The Board is excited to welcome Dr Jennifer Irvine as an appointee to the Board. Dr Irvine is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Pharmacology at Monash University, and also has lived experience with heart disease. With her professional and personal experience, Dr Irvine will be a great addition to the Board. - See the [Heart to Heart](#) section for more information about Jennifer.

Thankyou to Laerdal

Thanks to Laerdal, Heartbeat Victoria now has an automated external defibrillator (AED trainer). A Laerdal Medical AED trainer is a non-shocking training device designed to teach people how to use an AED during CPR and emergency response training. Laerdal AED trainers simulate the prompts, pads, and workflow of a real AED, but they do not deliver an electrical shock.

This one, which was on display at the recent Bendigo Be Well Be Connected Expo, is not for delivering formal training, but will help Heartbeat Victoria members become familiar with the device.

Annual General Meeting

The 2026 Annual General Meeting of Heartbeat Victoria will be held online, via Zoom, on Tuesday September 8, from 7pm. Any member of Heartbeat is welcome to attend, but only Board members and nominated delegates of branches and affiliates may vote. Heartbeat branches, please confirm the names and contact details of your delegates with the Board Secretary, Vivien Williamson (vivien@heartbeatvictoria.org.au), as soon as possible.

Any person may nominate for election to the Board. The Board is actively seeking new members with governance, marketing and engagement or communication skills. In addition, it would be good if each Heartbeat affiliate or branch could be represented on the Board. The relevant nomination form is included as part of this newsletter. If you would like to know more about the role of Board members, please contact Board President, Christine Rees (christine@heartbeatvictoria.org.au) or Secretary, Vivien Williamson (vivien@heartbeatvictoria.org.au).

Annual General Meeting Heartbeat Victoria Council Inc

Tuesday, September 8, 2026 at 7.00pm

Via Zoom

Meeting ID: 883 885 5290

Passcode: 011168

Agenda includes:

- ❖ Guest speaker – Dr Jen Irvine (Board member with lived experience of heart disease)
- ❖ Presentation of the Annual Report including Financial Statement
- ❖ Election of Board members
- ❖ Reports from branches and affiliates

ALL HEARTBEAT MEMBERS WELCOME TO ATTEND

Heart Health



Heart Week Activities



Heart Week is Australia's national heart health awareness week, held in May each year. **Heart Week 2026** was held from 4 – 10 May, however Heartbeat branches held a wide range of events relating to Heart Week over a two week period during May.

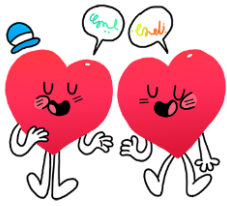
Heart Week provides an opportunity for the public and health professionals to have a conversation about heart health and take positive steps to reduce their risk of heart disease. The national campaign for 2026 focused on the theme "Never miss a BEAT," urging Australians to assess their cardiovascular risk and book Medicare-subsidised Heart Health Checks with their GP.

Heartbeat Sunraysia went all out with events on four days of Heart Week, including a display board in the front foyer of Mildura Base Hospital and attendance at a cardiac rehab session; a heart failure presentation at the hospital; a Branch cuppa catch-up at the hospital; and finally a Heart Healthy Lunch at the hospital.

Meanwhile, the **Heartbeat Goulburn Valley Branch and Tatura Walking Group** combined for a Heart Week related event on May 18, which focussed on some of the services available in the local community that support heart and general health and wellbeing.



Next year's Heart Week will take place from 3 – 9 May, 2027.



Heart to Heart

featuring one member's heart health or peer support experience

Dr Jennifer (Jen) Irvine



Jennifer Irvine completed her PhD in the field of cardiovascular pharmacology at Monash University. She then moved to the Baker Heart & Diabetes Research Institute in Prahran, to continue her research into novel treatments for cardiovascular diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart failure. While at the Baker Institute, Jennifer was awarded two consecutive National Heart Foundation Post-Doctoral Research Fellowships to support her research.

As is common for early career scientists, Jennifer was given the opportunity to supervise Summer Vacation and Honours students in their research projects and she realised that she had a particular interest in working with students to develop their own scientific understanding and practice. In 2015, Jennifer transitioned from bench research into the tertiary education space and is

currently a Lecturer in the Department of Pharmacology at Monash University, teaching Science, Biomedical Science and Medicine undergraduate units. Jennifer has established herself as an enthusiastic educator who is committed to developing authentic teaching and learning activities, resources and assessments that encourage students to link their learning with the real world. In 2023, Jennifer was awarded the prestigious Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists (ASCEPT) Gillian Shenfield Early Educator Award which was established to recognise and reward teaching initiatives that enhance pharmacology education and lead to improved student outcomes.

Around her teaching, Jennifer is actively involved in education research, working with other academics and research students on variety of projects, such as investigating how teamwork is implemented in biomedical science units, with a view to improving student teamwork experiences in their university studies.

Outside of her professional life, Jennifer has intimate personal experience with the devastating impact that sudden cardiac events can have on many facets of a person's life. While working as a heart researcher at the Baker Institute, Jennifer's professional and personal worlds collided spectacularly when she suffered two heart attacks less than a year apart, both resulting from spontaneous dissection of a coronary artery (SCAD). Additionally, it was likely that she had suffered an earlier SCAD event that went undiagnosed when she was admitted to hospital.

As a young, fit woman with no cardiovascular risk factors, Jennifer experienced delays in diagnosis and treatment for her heart attacks. At that time, SCAD was considered to be a very rare condition and Jennifer experienced misunderstanding and even dismissal of her condition from some healthcare providers. Knowledge and understanding of SCAD has come a long way in the 10 plus years since Jennifer's first diagnosed heart attack, but there is still a lot to be discovered about this condition, which is now recognised as the leading cause of heart attack in women under 50. Unfortunately, the uncertainty of living with a heart condition was reinforced yet again for Jennifer, when she suffered another SCAD heart attack in January 2022.

Jennifer is excited to join the Board of Heartbeat Victoria which she sees as making tangible differences in cardiac survivors' care and post-event life. She hopes to be able to increase her advocacy role for other less "typical", and perhaps less seen, sufferers of cardiovascular disease.



What's been happening at our branches and affiliates lately?

Goulburn Valley and Tatura



Photo: Deputy Director, Pharmacy, GVH, Stephanie Mastrocinque

Heartbeat Goulburn Valley Branch continues to have night dinner meetings and education on the first Monday monthly. This also allows time for members to socialise and develop lasting friendships. The enthusiastic Tatura members also attend each month, with eight-ten members travelling to Shepparton.

At the April meeting, Deputy Director, Pharmacy, Goulburn Valley Health (GVH), Stephanie Mastrocinque, provided an informative presentation focusing on cardiac medications, in particular some of the newer ones now being used to treat patients.



Photo: Member, Kevin, practicing his CPR technique

At the May meeting, as part of Heart Week, members and friends present learned what to do in the case of a cardiac arrest - *Call an Ambulance (000), start CPR and keep going until help arrives.*

Shepparton Paramedic Shaun, shared the "Chain of Survival" with those present, including why early recognition, CPR, defibrillation (AED/defib) and getting to hospital quickly are crucial. A lot was learned from Shaun's informative and hands-on presentation. This event was made possible with the support of Community Health Nurse, Tatura GVH, Michele .



Photo: Paramedic, Shaun, being thanked by President, Mark Rovers

Heartbeat Tatura Walking and Support Group continues to hold its walks on Monday morning at 10.00am and has eighteen registered walkers. The group is slowly growing, and members say how they enjoy the social aspects of the group, as well as all the benefits of the exercise itself. Many have increased the distance they can now walk.

The Heartbeat groups combined to organise a " Health and Wellbeing" session on May 18, as part of The Heart Foundation, Heart Week.

This event was made possible through the support of Goulburn Valley Health and the Tatura Community House, with whom the group has a valued working relationship. A display for Heart Week was set up at the entrance to the Community House with information available.



The aim of the session was to focus on some of the services available in the local community that support heart and general health and wellbeing. The speakers covered the topics of Heart Health Checks, Heartbeat Tatura Walking Group and Heartbeat peer support group, GVH Health Coaching, GVH Community Health Nurse and GVH, HARP, Disease Management Team, with a focus on heart failure.



Photo: Candice, Meredith, Robyn, Kirstin, and Michele, presenters at Health and Wellbeing session

Thirty-one people attended, including two nursing students which was pleasing to see. All present received an information bag on arrival. The presentations were concise and informative with questions from the audience also answered.

The day concluded with an afternoon tea supplied by members and people stayed on, spoke with presenters and generally were quite social. The feedback



was very positive with many of those present saying they had learned a lot. Some have indicated a wish to join groups and access services outlined. Many thanks to all who contributed to the success of the event.

South Gippsland

The following is an excerpt of article published in the April 14 edition of the South Gippsland Sentinel-Times (Andrew Paloczi) in relation to a significant and very successful event organised by Heartbeat South Gippsland.

Valuable heart health insights in Korumburra



Photo: Secretary, Heartbeat South Gippsland, Janne Grenon, Professor Rebecca Ritchie of Monash University, and Heartbeat Victoria President. Christine Rees

People listened intently and asked lots of questions during an informative heart health session in Korumburra on Tuesday, hearing from heart researcher Professor Rebecca Ritchie, and Christine Rees who is President of support organisation Heartbeat Victoria.

A key message delivered is that a heart attack can feel different from person to person and doesn't always result in crushing pain, Professor Ritchie giving the example of a nurse who didn't realise she was having a heart attack as the symptoms didn't match those she expected.

Professor Ritchie, who is a Cardiac Pharmacologist and Head of Drug Discovery Biology at Monash University, is on the Board of Heartbeat Victoria, a volunteer-run not-for-profit organisation, the main role of which is to support people living with heart disease and their families, through community-based peer support.

Ms Rees highlighted the importance of such support by outlining her own experience years ago of being diagnosed with heart failure as a fit and busy mother of four who was working full-time but couldn't understand why she was always so exhausted. "When I was diagnosed, I got a bag of pills and the next appointment," she said, having not been offered any support despite the shock news. In her case, assumptions were made that she couldn't have such a condition due to her high level of fitness, despite a family history of heart disease.

Professor Ritchie urged people to be persistent and assertive if they are concerned there is an issue with their health. "It doesn't hurt to be bossy about your health," she said.

Despite the vast progress that has been made in research over the years, improving the lifespan and quality of life for many with heart disease, there's still plenty more to discover.

"We don't know what all the risk factors are," Professor Ritchie acknowledged following discussion of people who eat well, exercise and don't smoke but still develop heart disease.

She stressed the importance of those involved in heart research interacting with people with experience of heart disease, inviting such members of the cardiac community to chat to her about their experiences, with feedback received influencing the approach to research.

"I make time to engage with people outside the university, with clinicians, community groups and people living with heart disease, and those conversations don't slow my research down, they sharpen it," Professor Ritchie said.

Such discussions inform the research by identifying questions that need to be asked and ways to test those ideas. She gave an example of an important insight shared by a person experiencing heart disease who explained that living as long as possible wasn't their main priority but rather wanting to be able to participate in life, spending time with the grandchildren and not being constantly tired.

"That conversation changed how we define success for our research," Professor Ritchie noted. "Alongside traditional measures of heart function, we ask whether new treatments can help the heart cope better with effort."

Tests are conducted on mice, with other approaches including creating miniature hearts using stem cell technology that provide early insight into whether a new drug that is being developed may be able to rescue a failing human heart. "

We also can look inside the heart cells, measuring the activity of different proteins to try and understand how and why a treatment works," Professor Ritchie explained. She spoke of the simple improvements progress in heart treatment can make to people's lives, such as not having to choose whether to meet a friend for coffee or go to the supermarket, and being able to get to the kitchen to make a cup of tea without too much exertion.

President of the Korumburra Senior Citizens Club and Secretary of Heartbeat South Gippsland, based in Korumburra, Janne Grenon, was a driving force in organising the informative session, having undergone heart surgeries but quipping "I'm still perfect." "Let's face it, we're all ageing, aren't we," she said when asked why she organised the event, describing both the Seniors group and those in Heartbeat as "a wonderful mob of people".

Ms Grenon said the local Heartbeat group is a small one, having been downsized by the impact of the pandemic, and is keen to welcome new members. "It's such an essential thing, the support," she said. Heartbeat South Gippsland meets at 11am on the third Friday of the month at Korumburra's Austral Hotel, members enjoying lunch and the social vibe. Those keen to join are encouraged to call Ms Grenon on 0488 996 187 or email her at grenonj@dcsi.net.au.

Ballarat

Winter days in Ballarat are cold; we live in the highlands of Victoria so outdoor walks can be a challenge in Winter. Heartbeat Ballarat hold five walks weekly, three outdoor walks in different scenic locations and two indoor walks.

Numbers attending walks currently vary slightly depending on the wind, rain, and cold. Also, the exit factor, regular walking members who exit to warmer, mostly interstate or overseas locations, during June to August annually.



Photo: Saturday Walk Leader Cris Yates (far left) with some Saturday morning walkers

How many people are on our Ballarat walks each week?

The Tuesday indoor walk at the Ballarat Badminton Stadium is averaging over 40 each week.

The Wednesday walk at scenic Lake Esmond is up to 30 each week.

The newly commenced Thursday indoor walk at Delacombe Town Centre has grown to 14 each week.

The Friday walk in the beautiful Ballarat Botanic Gardens attracts approximately 30 each week.

The Saturday walk in Ballarat's tree filled Victoria Park attracts around 10-12 walkers each Saturday.

Heartbeat Ballarat proudly notices, invites, welcomes, and includes members with diverse abilities. All walks are supervised and supported. Members set their own walking pace and distance walked. Members using walking aids are encouraged to walk and at a recent Tuesday indoor walk eight members with mobility walkers participated. It's great to see one hundred plus Ballarat folk taking steps for heart health weekly.



Photo: Julianna with Ballarat Committee members Helen, Barry, and Anne

Julianna Addison MP, Victorian State Member for Wendouree, recently accepted an invitation to meet Heartbeat's Tuesday indoor walkers. Julianna is a great conversationalist and, before entering Parliament, was a history teacher at Ballarat Clarendon College and Board Director of Ballarat Health Services.

Julianna arrived with several staff members and she walked, talked, and walked again, freely mixing with majority of walkers. Mrs Addison's Ballarat Health Services Board involvements had given her a strong understanding of the value of peer support and the improvements that flow from patient lead peer support and social connection.

On April 23rd, Heartbeat Ballarat members met for a Meet, Greet, and Eat dinner meeting followed by guest speakers who talked about the factors that lead to falls and how those risks can be reduced. Members listened, interacted with, and asked lots of questions of and then warmly thanked, guest speakers Kidman Ng and Linda Macauley, from Grampians Health Services.



Photo: Kidman Ng and Linda Macauley presenting session on Falls Prevention



On April 29th, Lyn Bryce and Ross Jones from Ballarat Highlands Bowls Region, presented \$2,500 to Grampians Health Cardiology Ward. This contribution came from the long-running Heartbeat Bowls Tournament, where local Ballarat bowls clubs come together each January to raise funds in support of cardiac care at both Grampians Health Ballarat and St John of God Ballarat Hospital. Commencing in January 1987, the Heartbeat Bowls Tournament has

donated an incredible \$170,000, supporting heart health services across our Ballarat community. Heartbeat Ballarat Committee is excited to be part of the 40th tournament planned for January 2027.

The Ballarat Community Disability Expo, also held on April 29th, was a great opportunity for Heartbeat Ballarat to promote the peer support, the exercise, and the social connection opportunities made available through Heartbeat Victoria locally. The Expo was an interesting half day with 32 varied stallholders and 207 attendees coming together to connect and learn. 350 Heartbeat walk time sheets and brochures were distributed, along with heart stickers, and other small heart related novelties.

Bendigo

Heartbeat Victoria President Christine, Ballarat volunteers Leigh, and Alan, and Alicja from the Heart Foundation Walking Program, shared an information table at the City of Bendigo Be Well Be Connected (positive ageing and disability) Expo on May 7th. There were over 70 exhibitors and there was strong interest in the establishment of regular Bendigo walks for heart health.



Photo: Alicja, Christine, Leigh, and Alan at the City of Bendigo Expo

Sunraysia



Heartbeat Sunraysia kicked off the beginning of an exciting and busy Heart Week early on Monday May 4th with the erection our amazing display board, which was front and centre in the front foyer of our Mildura Base Hospital, which created lots of interest from the outset.

From there, Elaine (Secretary) and Julie (President) attended the Cardiac Rehab Session made up of a very enthusiastic, inquisitive and happy group. The session ended on a positive vibe with two, very interested, prospective new members.

Our second event on Tuesday 5th was a Heart Failure presentation at the Hospital by nurses Amy Stanbrook and Emma Bath, who acknowledged Heartbeat Sunraysia members in attendance as very special guests to the large group of attendees.

Our third event on Wednesday 6th was our Cuppa Catch-up, held in the Hospital Courtyard. Heartbeat Sunraysia members were conspicuous as a sea of red and made very welcome by Amy and other hospital staff. Amy ensured we were treated to her delicious, specially made "Heart" shaped and decorated biscuits to eat with our hot drinks. What a fun filled time we enjoyed there.

Our last event for Heart Week, on Friday 8th May, was again hosted in the Base Hospital's Courtyard. It was a "Healthy Heart Lunch" consisting of delicious fish or chicken poke bowls and a container of fresh fruit salad.

The many conversations and contacts made truly lifted our profile and presence within our community. Watch the Heartbeat Sunraysia Branch News on the Heartbeat Victoria website for upcoming events and activities.

Please send us your latest news for inclusion in the Spring 2026 edition of Heartbeat Happenings which will be published in May 2025 (send to vivien@heartbeatvictoria.org.au by Friday August 7, 2026.



**Heartbeat Victoria Council Inc. Annual General Meeting
Tuesday 8 September, 2026**

Election of Board Members, including Office Bearers

NOMINATION FORM

Name: _____

Position (see below): _____

Nominated by: _____

Seconded by: _____

I accept my nomination for the above position

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return your nomination form to the Board Secretary, Barry Nixon via email vivien@heartbeatvictoria.org.au by Monday 7 September, 2026

Available Board Positions for 2026 AGM

President
Vice President
Secretary
Assistant Secretary

Assistant Treasurer
Ordinary Board Member