

Media Release



27 January 2012

One in three uninsured won't call 000 for heart attack

A third of people without some form of ambulance cover would not call Triple Zero (000) even if they thought they were having a heart attack, research¹ released today by the National Heart Foundation of Australia reveals.

In Queensland and Tasmania, where universal ambulance coverage is adopted, 84% of people would call for an ambulance if they thought they were having a heart attack, but that drops to 67% for residents in other states who are not covered.

"An Australian dies from a heart attack every 51 minutes and 50% never make it to hospital so it's vital that we address any barriers to people seeking help," said Dr Lyn Roberts, National CEO of the Heart Foundation.

"More than 40% of uninsured people in states that do not have universal ambulance cover tell us that it's too expensive to call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance," Dr Roberts said.

The Heart Foundation has been gathering further evidence on the potential impact of universal ambulance cover for all Australians after releasing an independent discussion paper on the issue in May 2010.

"Importantly, we've found that patients deemed to be emergency cases are more likely to get to hospital by ambulance in Queensland and Tasmania²," Dr Roberts continued.

"Using an ambulance is the safest way to get to hospital and also results in faster access to the most appropriate treatment for heart attack.

"Our analysis also indicates that in the longer term universal cover does not significantly increase ambulance use for non-urgent cases presenting to hospital when demand management measures such as community education are in place.

"We are now in the process of conducting further economic modelling to assess the budgetary impacts and potential benefits of universal ambulance cover for all Australians.

"Once we have built that complete picture, the Heart Foundation will present its recommendations," Dr Roberts concluded.

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¹ Heart Foundation survey of 11,663 Australian adults aged 30-65 conducted between January and December 2010.

² Heart Foundation analysis of the patient emergency department presentations by triage category and arrival mode, states & territories, cited in Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 'Australian Hospital Statistics' publications 2006/07 – 2009/10