Eliminate rheumatic heart disease

What is the Heart Foundation asking the next Queensland Government to do?

Eliminate rheumatic heart disease by supporting the National rheumatic fever strategy, RHD Australia, and by taking action in Queensland.

Fund and implement a rheumatic heart disease action plan: $30m over 3 years

Queensland’s rheumatic heart disease (RHD) action plan needs adequate funding and implementation. New Zealand allocates $60m over six years for RHD control, whereas for a similar population, Queensland only has $1.2m annually ($900,000 Federal, $300,000 State).

The number of identified cases has risen significantly since the Queensland RHD Registry and Control Program began in 2010, without increased funding.

Regulate rheumatic heart disease as a notifiable condition: Low cost regulation

Queensland needs a regulation to make RHD a notifiable condition, because there is a gap in detecting and treating people. Acute rheumatic fever (ARF) is notifiable, but RHD cases are being missed and left untreated.
Why action is needed

Rheumatic heart disease has been almost completely eliminated from non-Indigenous communities. It is largely preventable, being a disease of poverty and overcrowded housing conditions.

Effective prevention will require action from multiple sectors outside health. It is a national disgrace that this disease continues amongst our Indigenous people and within some refugee groups.

RHD is the result of repeated cases of acute rheumatic fever caused by an infection – Group A streptococcal bacteria. It results in chronic damage to the valves in the heart and is a lifelong burden for people, who usually contract it during childhood.

Effective treatment requires early detection and long term clinical follow-up for years. Indigenous Australians are eight times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be hospitalised for these conditions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represented 87% of clients on Queensland’s Rheumatic Heart Disease Register in 2014.

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