

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Heart attack risk doubled in Australians with less education**

Australians who leave school without a school certificate are more than twice as likely to have a heart attack as those with a university degree, according to groundbreaking new research from the largest ongoing study of healthy ageing in Australia, the Sax Institute's 45 and Up Study.

Researchers investigated the links between education and cardiovascular disease events (such as a heart attack or stroke) by following 267,153 men and women in NSW aged over 45, who are part of the Sax Institute's 45 and Up Study, for over five years. The results were published in the *International Journal for Equity in Health* and were the subject of discussion at the *Cardiovascular Disease Inequalities Partnership Project* meeting today in Canberra.

"The lower your education, the more likely you are to have a heart attack or a stroke – that's the disturbing but clear finding from our research," said lead researcher Dr Rosemary Korda, a Fellow at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at The Australian National University (ANU).

"Our study found that in adults aged 45-64 years, heart attack rates among those with no educational qualifications were more than double (around 150% higher) those of people with a university degree. The risk was around two-thirds (70%) higher among those with intermediate levels of education (non-university qualifications).

"Mid-age adults who hadn't completed high school were 50% more likely to have a first stroke than those with a university degree; those with intermediate levels of education (non-university qualifications) were 20% more likely."

Dr Korda said a similar pattern of inequality existed between household income and cardiovascular disease events.

"What these differences in cardiovascular disease rates between more and less disadvantaged groups show us is just how much cardiovascular disease in the population can be prevented. The *Cardiovascular Disease Inequalities Partnership Project* is continuing research in this area to better understand what is driving these socioeconomic differences."

Professor Emily Banks, Scientific Director of the 45 and Up Study and Head of Epidemiology for Policy and Practice at ANU, said these findings demonstrated the value of the 45 and Up Study as an unparalleled Australian research resource making it possible for researchers to investigate big questions in large numbers of people and to get faster answers that are useful for policy makers.

"This research demonstrates, now that we have more robust data, how much worse the inequalities in cardiovascular disease are than we previously thought," said Professor Banks. "This research also provides important clues about how much cardiovascular disease can be prevented."

CEO of the Heart Foundation NSW Kerry Doyle said that heart disease was the single leading cause of death in Australia, with an average of one Australian dying every 27 minutes.

"We know that a good education impacts long term health by influencing what type of job you have, where you live and what food choices you make," said Ms Doyle.

"This research provides an opportunity to further unpack the specific relationship between educational achievement and cardiovascular disease risk, and what can be done to reduce this risk," she added.

**Download the paper:** <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-016-0471-0>

45 and Up Study funding partners:



**About The Sax Institute:**

The Sax Institute is an independent Australian leader in helping decision makers find and make best use of research to solve real-world health and social problems.

**About the Cardiovascular Disease Inequalities Investigators Project:**

The Cardiovascular Disease Inequalities Partnership Project is collaboration between the Australian National University, The Agency for Clinical Innovation, The Consumers Health Forum of Australia and The National Heart Foundation. It is partly funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council and The National Heart Foundation.

**About the 45 and Up Study:**

The Sax Institute's 45 and Up Study is the largest ongoing study of healthy ageing in the Southern Hemisphere, involving a quarter of a million people – one in every 10 men and women aged 45 and over in NSW.

It is a major national research tool being used by both researchers and policy makers to better understand how Australians are ageing, how they're using health services, how to prevent and manage ill-health and disability and how this can guide decisions on our health system.

Over time, we are asking all participants ongoing questions about their health, lifestyle, and the medications they use. This is providing the first large-scale, comprehensive measure of health as people move from mid to later life and allowing governments and health policy makers to better plan health services and programs for our ageing population.

Previous research findings from the study include:

- Up to two in every three Australian smokers can be expected to die from their habit if they don't quit
- Sleeping more than nine hours a night, sitting too much during the day and a lack of exercise is a hazardous combination for health
- Overweight and obesity account for \$1 in every \$6 spent in hospitals, costing our hospitals around \$4 billion per year
- Retirement is good for your health, with retirees smoking less, more physically active, sleeping more and sitting less than those in the workforce.

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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