MEDIA RELEASE

**New Film provides solutions to Rheumatic Heart Disease**

A new feature film about the change needed to solve a national health crisis amongst young Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples will premiere next Tuesday 15 March, during Close the Gap week.

The film premiere comes as the issue of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) was highlighted by the ABC’s Four Corners program, followed by an outpouring of deep concern from the general public.

The new film, *Take Heart: Deadly Heart*, is a follow up from the 2016 film, *Take Heart: The Quest to Rid Australasia from Rheumatic Heart Disease* which drew national attention to this largely invisible disease. Despite the success of this initial film and campaign, RHD remains a significant issue. As many as two Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples die each week from the totally preventable disease, which has been effectively eliminated in non-indigenous Australians.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) states that 87% of people diagnosed with RHD are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders and they are six times more likely to be hospitalised with the disease than non-indigenous Australians. In fact, Australia has one of the highest recorded rates of RHD in the world.

*Take Heart: Deadly Heart features* Vicki Wade, a proud Noongar woman and Director of RHDAustralia who said the film demonstrates that by investing in community-led initiatives and prevention programs, RHD is a problem that can be solved.

“The nation needs to stand up and do something about this tragic and totally preventable cause of death before more of our young people are killed. Communities are ready and many are already taking action,” Vicki Wade said.

“We have community leadership, we have the medical technology, and we have a clear pathway to ending RHD with the *Rheumatic Heart Disease Endgame Strategy*; it must happen now.”

*Take Heart: Deadly Heart* tells the inspiring story of the journey towards an RHD-free future, and how remote Aboriginal communities across the top end of Australia are adopting innovative strategies to eliminate RHD.

It is a powerful film for general audiences, that celebrates Indigenous culture and demonstrates how community-led programs can put RHD in the history books once and for all. The film incorporates themes of truth-telling, Indigenous leadership, language, culture, identity, reconciliation, education, health and self-determination.

The film features Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders Dion Devow (ACT Australian of the Year 2018) and Lorraine Kabbindi White (Indigenous Artist and Filmmaker). The film also features Adam Goodes (2014 Australian of the Year) and paediatric cardiologist Dr Bo Remenyi (NT Australian of the Year 2018).

“I’ve been working closely with children, families, communities and health experts across this nation, and I’ve seen too many young people die because of neglect, disinterest, racism and poor health outcomes, all of which are utterly preventable,” Dr Remenyi said

“That’s why I encourage everyone to see this film and help build national understanding of the campaign for change needed to solve this crisis.”

The premiere of the *Take Heart: Deadly Heart* film is next Tuesday 15 March at Cinema Nova in Melbourne and on Wednesday 16 March in Sydney at the Eternity Playhouse, Darlinghurst Theatre Company. Screenings across the country will follow, including in top end communities, leading children’s hospitals and universities nationwide. For more information, visit <https://takeheartrhd.com/>

Watch the **TAKE HEART: DEADLY HEART** trailer [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKn_jbGYxbk)

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**Background**

Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) starts with a sore throat or infected skin sores, symptoms of a common bacterial infection (Group A Streptococcus) in children 5-15 years of age. If left untreated, this can develop into Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) and the permanent heart damage known as RHD, which can lead to open-heart surgery, permanent disability, stroke and premature death. Key risk factors include poverty, overcrowding and reduced access to medical care.

While RHD is a disease that is completely preventable, health system failures, low health literacy, overcrowding and environmental factors are contributing to growing rates of the disease in Australia. In 2018, the World Health Assembly passed an international resolution requiring countries, including Australia, to prevent and eliminate RHD.

Without action, it is estimated as many as 9,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will develop acute rheumatic fever or RHD by 2031.

The *RHD Endgame Strategy*, developed by RHDAustralia, requires an initial Phase 1 investment of $40M over three years by the Federal Government. This initial investment would demonstrate Australia’s commitment to ending RHD and respond to immediate need. Individuals and organisations with significant history and experience in supporting communities with RHD must be part of the solution and the funding approach.

The initial investment for phase 1 implementation of the *RHD Endgame Strategy* has 5 Priority Action Areas: 1. Care and support 2. Community based programs 3. Early intervention 4 Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Leadership 5. Healthy environments

To make tangible progress towards ending RHD, the full cost of implementing the *RHD Endgame Strategy* is $649M over a decade.

The film is endorsed by the Close the Gap Day campaign and Aboriginal peak organisation ANTaR.

**Tickets to the Premieres**

**Melbourne 15 March – Cinema Nova, Carlton**

Bookings: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/take-heart-deadly-heart-film-launch-tickets-262238461297>

**Sydney 16 March – Eternity Playhouse, Darlinghurst Theatre Company.**

Bookings: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/take-heart-deadly-hear-vip-screening-event-sydney-tickets-271820822397>

**Melbourne Thursday 17 March - National Close the Gap Day Free screening at Federation Square**

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