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MEDIA RELEASE

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More action needed to help Indigenous kids fight rheumatic heart disease

The award-winning documentary, *Take Heart*, premiered at Parliament House in Canberra this evening highlighting the need for greater focus and action on acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, a crippling and often fatal disease which is affecting one in 50 Indigenous Australians.

“Indigenous Australians, Maoris and Pacific Islanders have amongst the highest rates of rheumatic heart disease in the world. Children, young adults and pregnant woman are hardest hit,” said Chair of the Aspen Foundation, Mel Keys.

“In countries as fortunate as Australia, there is no reason that Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease should threaten and damage the lives of any more children, their families and the community.”

“We know this disease is 100% preventable through the simple administration of one of the oldest and cheapest antibiotics – penicillin; also, early detection, diagnosis and management can reduce life-threatening complications,” said Snow Foundation CEO, Georgina Byron.

Take Heart is a communications initiative designed to educate at-risk communities and health professionals and elevate the disease as a public health priority. The materials include a one-hour feature film shown around Australia and on SBS, 14 short films, and an action toolkit sponsored by Bupa distributed in the Top End to health clinics and some schools, and introducing *Take Heart* into the school curriculum with two smart phone apps which enables kids to stay on track with their penicillin injections, a website, social media, touring films and photography exhibitions.

Take Heart director Mike Hill said if rheumatic heart disease was not addressed more intensively, Indigenous health outcomes would remain far below that of non-Indigenous Australians.

“Today, thousands of indigenous Australasian children are at risk of contracting Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) from a common sore throat (“Strep Throat”) or from the transmission of Group A Strep bacterium through infected skin sores. Repeated exposure to rheumatic fever leads to life-threatening rheumatic heart disease which can tragically end with open heart surgery, permanent disability, stroke, heart failure and premature death.

“*Take Heart* lifts the lid on this disease through the incredible true-life stories of young people living with the disease, their families and health workers caring for them, so that their stories can inspire all of us to take action to help eradicate rheumatic heart disease as a public health issue.”

More information on Take Heart can be found at: www.takeheart.tv

More information on the Aspen Foundation can be found at: www.aspenfoundation.org.au

More information on the Snow Foundation can be found at: www.snowfoundation.org.au

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