

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **Funds to be raised for life-saving defibrillator in Narrabri**

Working in conjunction with St John Ambulance Australia (NSW), the Barwon Division of General Practice (BDGP) is initiating a community fundraising project in Narrabri to raise funds to purchase an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) to be placed in the local community.

The fundraising is part of **Project HeartStart Australia**, which aims to increase public access to defibrillation in the event of Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA). SCA is Australia's biggest killer, taking the lives of between 25,000-30,000 people every year. The most successful treatment for SCA is defibrillation within a few minutes of the event.

The goal of **Project HeartStart Australia**, which was launched in 2004, is to have defibrillators available at more public places – particularly in regional areas where ambulances may not be as readily available.

After becoming aware of the **Project HeartStart Australia** in 2005, The Barwon Division of General Practice (BDGP) began a local fundraising project to purchase three AEDs to be located in Moree. Enough money was raised to purchase the AEDs, which have been placed in local pharmacies and medical centres.

The BDGP has also undertaken a successful project in Gunnedah, and is now moving its focus to raising funds in Narrabri.

According to St John (NSW) Chief Executive Officer Sean Gavin, defibrillation is the best chance people have of surviving a sudden cardiac arrest.

“The current survival rate from SCA outside a hospital remains low. Unfortunately, CPR alone is often just not enough. If someone receives defibrillation within the first three minutes of having a sudden cardiac arrest, their chance of survival improves dramatically. It really does make a significant difference.

“AEDs really are the safest and most effective way for members of the public to save the lives of family, friends and co-workers from SCA. They are a critical step in the ‘chain of survival’ for a sudden cardiac arrest victim,” said Mr Gavin.

According to St John (NSW), many of its first aid volunteers have access to defibrillators at major events and as a result have had many successes in resuscitating a SCA casualty who would have otherwise become another statistic.

“Lives have certainly been saved because of the availability of AEDs, and with the generous sponsorship of NRMA Insurance, we are able to continue the wide-spread introduction of AEDs into the community through **Project HeartStart Australia**,” said Mr Gavin.

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# **Automatic External Defibrillation Fact Sheet**

## ***What is Sudden Cardiac Arrest?***

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is the unexpected collapse of a person, whose heart has ceased to function due to an electrical malfunction of the heart, disrupting the heart muscle's normal rhythm. SCA is not a heart attack; a heart attack is a problem with the plumbing of the heart. In a heart attack one or more of the arteries delivering blood to the heart is blocked, so oxygen in the blood cannot reach the heart muscle and the heart muscle is damaged. SCA is often linked with sudden chest pain.

## ***What is a defibrillator?***

Defibrillation is a process of restoring the heart's normal rhythm and is crucial in the first minutes following SCA to maximise the chance of a casualty's survival. The portable Automated External Defibrillator (AED) has a built-in computer chip, which analyses the casualty's rhythm, and determines whether defibrillation is needed. The AED will only allow the user to deliver a shock if ventricular fibrillation is detected. Users respond to voice prompts delivered from the device after it is activated.

## ***Why is early defibrillation so important?***

Early defibrillation is the key to survival from SCA. SCA is fatal if the casualty is not quickly resuscitated. The casualty has only a short time from collapse until death. For every minute defibrillation is delayed, a person loses 10% of a chance at life.

## ***About the National Public Access Defibrillation program 'Project HeartStart Australia'***

St John Ambulance originally launched a National Public Access Defibrillation program 'Project HeartStart Australia' in February 2004. This program was aimed at reducing the mortality rate of pre-hospital Sudden Cardiac Arrest victims.

The program, originally supported by Insurance Australia Group/NRMA retail brand in NSW, is a community based defibrillation program designed to encourage lay persons to use this simple, yet life saving first aid device.

We accept that we can not have automated external defibrillators everywhere but if we can make them readily available in as many public places as possible, they will have the potential to make a difference to survival rates. The more automated external defibrillators available in the community the greater the chances of a victim being saved.

Areas identified to participate in this program include airports, shopping centres, convention centres, schools, sporting venues, registered clubs, tourist attractions and rural and remote areas.

In 2005, St John Ambulance was selected by the Commonwealth Government to undertake The Design and Implementation Phase of a Public Access Defibrillation Demonstration Project, hence broadening Project HeartStart Australia.

The involvement of Local Councils, Community groups, shopping centres and businesses in the additional purchases and installation of defibrillators will assist St John in continuing to broaden the Public Access Defibrillation Program.