



## MEDIA RELEASE

23 May 2007

# Life-saving program implemented by Port Stephens Council

St John (NSW) congratulates Port Stephens Council for its commitment to purchase and install automated external defibrillators at Council sites across the area to use as a first aid response for cardiac arrest.

Members, visitors and staff will have access to the defibrillators to use in the unfortunate incident of someone suffering a cardiac arrest. The widespread availability of automated external defibrillators in the community is critical to overcoming Australia's sudden cardiac arrest problem.

Automated external defibrillators can shock the heart back into a normal rhythm following a sudden cardiac arrest.

Prominent cardiologist, Professor Michael O'Rourke, states that defibrillation is the only real chance people have of surviving a sudden cardiac arrest.

"The current survival rate from sudden cardiac arrest outside a hospital is less than 10%. Unfortunately, CPR alone is often just not enough," said Professor O'Rourke.

"If someone receives defibrillation within the first 3 minutes of having a sudden cardiac arrest, their chance of survival improves dramatically, well over 50%. It really does make a significant difference."

Raelene Tate, Regional Development Manager, St John (NSW) says, "Automated external defibrillators really are the safest and most effective way for members of the public to save the lives of family, friends and co-workers from sudden cardiac arrest. They are a critical step in the 'chain of survival' for a sudden cardiac arrest victim."

"St John first aid volunteers have access to defibrillators at all major events and have had many successes in resuscitating a sudden cardiac arrest casualty that would have otherwise been another statistic," Ms Tate said.

For further information about defibrillators and other first aid kits and equipment call 1300 360 455 or visit [www.stjohnnsw.com.au](http://www.stjohnnsw.com.au).

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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.



## First in First Aid



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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.