

MEDIA RELEASE
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Funds raised to purchase life-saving defibrillators in Gunnedah

Working in conjunction with St John Ambulance Australia (NSW), the Barwon Division of General Practice (BDGP) has successfully initiated a community fundraising project in Gunnedah to raise the funds needed to purchase two Automated External Defibrillators (AED) to be placed in the local community.

BDGP has now purchased the AEDs, which will be installed at Karen Carter Chemist and Hagley/Osmond Pharmacy. St John (NSW) will train up to 36 members of the Gunnedah community next Wednesday 23 January, to teach them how to use the machines.

Fiona Strang, the CEO of the Barwon Division of General Practice, comments:

“We would especially like to thank the Gunnedah District Development Board, Barber Street Medical Centre, the Gunnedah Services Club and an anonymous donor for their support in helping us raise the money to purchase these life-saving machines. It is wonderful to know that we can work together to provide an even safer community.”

The fundraising follows on from **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 by the community to purchase the AEDs, which have been placed in local pharmacies and medical centres.

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.

“Lives have certainly been saved because of the availability of AEDs, and with the initiative of groups such as the Barwon Division of General Practice, we are able to continue the wide-spread introduction of AEDs into communities throughout NSW,” said Mr Gavin.

The AED training will take place at The Gunnedah Services Club on Wednesday 23 January at 1pm. Media are welcome to attend and photo opportunities will be available.

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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.