

Heart & Stroke myth busting news release key messages and backgrounder for media

For release October 18, 2023

Top take-aways

- Half of Canadians have been touched by heart disease and stroke.
- Many Canadians do not know enough about heart disease and stroke. This is putting their own and their loved ones' health at risk.
- The death rate from heart disease and stroke has declined over the past 70 years but they are still the second leading cause of death in Canada and there still is much more to do. We need to raise awareness, improve prevention, save more lives and enhance recovery for people living with heart disease, stroke and vascular cognitive impairment and their caregivers.

Key messages

1. Half of Canadians have been touched by heart disease and stroke.

- According to a national Heart & Stroke poll, half of people in Canada have either experienced heart disease or stroke themselves or had a family member or close friend experience heart disease or stroke.
- Every five minutes someone dies from heart disease, stroke or vascular cognitive impairment.
- More than 3.5 million people in Canada are living with heart disease, stroke or vascular cognitive impairment.

2. Canadians do not know enough about heart disease and stroke and this is putting their own and their loved ones' health at risk.

- Although more than 3.5 million Canadians are living with heart disease, stroke or vascular cognitive impairment, according to a national Heart & Stroke poll there are gaps in understanding around prevention, risk factors, identifying serious conditions and medical emergencies, and knowing what action to take.

According to the Heart & Stroke poll:

1 in 3 Canadians do not understand that **cardiac arrest** and **heart attack** are different conditions – although both are medical emergencies.

- **Cardiac arrest** is often referred to as an electrical problem. Cardiac arrest means the heart has suddenly and unexpectedly stopped beating.
- **Signs of cardiac arrest** include sudden collapse, loss of consciousness, being unresponsive, and not breathing normally. Every second counts. Call 9-1-1, shout for an AED and start CPR immediately.
- **Heart attack** is often referred to as a plumbing problem of the heart; the blood flow to the heart is slowed or blocked. The person is often conscious, has a pulse, and is short of breath but their heart is still beating.
- **Signs of heart attack** include chest discomfort, sweating, upper body discomfort, nausea, shortness of breath or light-headedness. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number immediately.

1 in 3 Canadians do not know that the signs of **heart attack** can be different in women.

- The most common heart attack sign is chest pain, but women can experience a heart attack without chest discomfort. Women may experience shortness of breath, pressure or pain in the lower chest or abdomen, dizziness, upper back pressure or extreme fatigue.
- Half of women who experience heart attacks have their symptoms go unrecognized.
- More needs to be done to ensure women's heart and brain health is fully supported

1 in 3 Canadians do not know that most people who have a **cardiac arrest outside of hospital do not survive.**

- Nine in 10 (90%) people who have an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest do not survive. Cardiac arrest is a critical medical emergency that requires immediate intervention.
- Doing CPR and using an AED can double the chance of survival. If you witness someone in cardiac arrest take action immediately: Call 9-1-1, shout for an AED and start CPR immediately. Cardiac arrest is when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating.
- Cardiac arrest can strike anyone, anytime, anywhere, at any age, without warning.

7 in 10 Canadians do not understand the **risk factors for heart disease and stroke.**

- 7 in 10 Canadians mistakenly think that family history/genetics is the biggest risk factor for heart disease and stroke.
- High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease.
- Prevention is key. The following behaviours are important for preventing heart disease and stroke: eating a healthy diet, being physically active, living smoke-free, managing stress and managing blood pressure. Adopting these behaviours is easier for some more than others due to equity and access issues.
- Although many risk factors can be controlled through healthy behaviours as well as medication, some cannot be changed such as age, sex and medical history.
- Up to 80% of premature heart disease and stroke can be prevented.
- Nine in 10 Canadians have at least one risk factor for heart disease and stroke.
- Some people face inequities that affect their heart and brain health due to intersecting social and cultural factors. Sex, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, geography and body size, and ability can affect heart and brain health and access to health services.

Almost 1 in 3 Canadians mistakenly think if they witness someone having a **stroke they should immediately drive them to the nearest hospital as quickly as possible.**

- If someone has a stroke call 9-1-1 right away. **Do not drive to the hospital**, an ambulance will get them to the best hospital for stroke care. Lifesaving treatment begins the second you call 9-1-1.
- The faster someone experiencing a stroke gets to a hospital that provides acute stroke care services, the better their chances of survival with the best recovery possible.
- Know the FAST signs of stroke and what to do. **FAST** stands for: **Face** – is it drooping? **Arms** – can you raise both? **Speech** – is it slurred or jumbled? **Time** – to call 9-1-1 right away.
- Stroke is on the rise. More than 108,000 strokes occur in Canada every year.

1 in 3 Canadians do not know that most people who have a **stroke are left with some level of stroke-related disability.**

- About 60% of people who have had a stroke are left with some level of stroke-related disability and more than 40% of people who have a stroke are left with moderate to severe disability.
- A stroke can impact everything from the physical ability to do daily tasks and activities, to communication and social interaction, mood, emotion and cognition.
- More than 920,000 people in Canada are living with the effects of stroke.
- Every stroke is different, as is every recovery journey and the goal is to help people recover abilities and regain as much independence as possible.

1 in 3 Canadians think it is difficult to recognize the signs of **stroke if you're not a trained healthcare professional.**

- Everyone can learn the signs of stroke. FAST is an easy way to remember the most common signs. FAST stands for Face – is it drooping? Arms – can you raise both? Speech – is it slurred or jumbled? And Time – to call 9-1-1 right away.
- The faster someone experiencing a stroke gets to a hospital that provides acute stroke care services, the better their chances of survival with the best recovery possible.

- Stroke is on the rise. Approximately one stroke occurs every five minutes in Canada.

More than 4 in 10 Canadians do not understand heart failure.

- More than 4 in 10 Canadians think that heart failure means your heart suddenly stops, but it actually means your heart is not functioning as it should or there is a problem with its structure.
- Heart failure can lead to shortness of breath, fatigue and swelling in the legs or abdomen. Call your healthcare provider if you experience these symptoms.
- While heart failure cannot be cured, lifestyle changes and better treatment are helping people with heart failure live longer, healthier lives
- There are almost 788,000 people in Canada living with heart failure and this number is rising.

More than 1 in 4 Canadians mistakenly think that most children with congenital heart disease die before they are 18.

- Because of medical advances in Canada and around the world, 9 in 10 children with congenital heart disease survive to adulthood.
- Congenital heart disease means a heart condition that someone is born with and there are different types of congenital heart defects. It is a lifelong condition and the healthcare needs of those affected by it can change over time.

3. The death rate from heart disease and stroke has declined over the past 70 years but they are still the second leading cause of death in Canada and there still is much more to do to. We need to raise awareness, improve prevention, save more lives and enhance recovery for people living with heart disease, stroke and vascular cognitive impairment and their caregivers.

- Progress has been made by Heart & Stroke and many others around awareness, research, diagnosis, treatment and support, but more needs to be done to beat heart disease and stroke:
 - Fund life-saving, best-in-class heart and brain **research**.
 - Create healthier environments so all people in Canada can live the healthiest lives possible and **reduce their risk** for heart disease and stroke.
 - Strengthen **systems of care** across the country to improve current and future care for all patients.
 - Continue to **raise awareness** around the signs of **heart attack, cardiac arrest** and **stroke** and the immediate actions to take, as well as **prevention** and **risk factors**.
 - Better support people living with heart disease and stroke and their caregivers to make the best **recovery** possible and live life to the fullest.
 - Drive the change needed to beat health inequities and ensure everyone including **women, Indigenous people** and other **equity-deserving groups** receive the care they need when it comes to their heart and brain health.

**National, bilingual online poll of 2003 Canadian residents 18 years and older, carried out May 29 - June 9 2023 by Environics Research Group*

Heart & Stroke social handles and links

Twitter

- **EN:** @HeartandStroke (<https://twitter.com/HeartandStroke>)
- **FR:** @coeuretavc (<https://twitter.com/coeuretavc>)

Facebook

- **EN:** @heartandstroke (<https://www.facebook.com/heartandstroke>)
- **FR:** @coeuretavc (<https://www.facebook.com/coeuretavc>)

Instagram

- @heartandstroke (<https://www.instagram.com/heartandstroke/>)

LinkedIn

- @heartandstroke (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/heart-and-stroke>)