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## **GOVERNMENTS MUST COMMIT TO ENDING RHD**

### *Launch of RHD Endgame Strategy*

The AMA today called on all levels of government to commit to a new strategy to rid Australia of the scourge of rheumatic heart disease (RHD) by 2031.

Once a disease of over-crowded and unsanitary inner-city slums, RHD has long been consigned to the history books for most Australians. However, it continues to devastate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“As a founding member of the END RHD Coalition, the AMA welcomes today’s launch of the RHD Endgame Strategy,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said.

“RHD starts as a sore throat, or a skin infection known as ‘school sores’, yet every year it kills people and devastates lives, particularly young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives. It causes strokes in teenagers. Some children need open heart surgery.

“RHD is preventable, but incurable. Children must endure a painful penicillin injection every three to four weeks for at least five years, or until they are 21, whichever comes first.

“RHD is a disease of poverty, so it is a disgrace that a wealthy nation like Australia has one of the highest rates of RHD in the world.

“More than 5,000 people are currently living with RHD in Australia, with over 70 per cent being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“It is estimated that 8,500 more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will develop acute rheumatic fever or RHD by 2031, with children most at risk. We cannot sit back and let this happen.

“It has been four years since the AMA Indigenous Health Report Card laid out actions to eliminate RHD, yet vulnerable Australians are still being infected.

“To eliminate RHD, we need to prevent new cases. The Endgame Strategy outlines evidence-based strategies to achieve this.

“We now need governments, led by the Commonwealth, to act on this report and deliver the funding to make this happen.

“This is a unique opportunity to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health by committing to a comprehensive, long-term, resourced strategy to eliminate RHD in Australia.”

The AMA 2016 Indigenous Health Report Card is available at <https://ama.com.au/article/2016-ama-report-card-indigenous-health-call-action-prevent-new-cases-rheumatic-heart-disease>

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24 September 2020

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