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Access for Lifesaving Dialysis Treatment at Tipping Point Across Australia

Kidney Health Australia is calling on the Federal Government to invest in early detection of kidney disease as Australians living with kidney failure struggle to get access to lifesaving dialysis treatment.

The call to action for early detection and treatment of incurable chronic kidney disease is centre stage this week at Parliament House in Canberra.

Together with the kidney community and the new Parliamentary Friends of Kidney Health, co-chaired by **Senator Marielle Smith** and **Warren Entsch MP**, CEO of **Kidney Health Australia Chris Forbes** says people living with kidney disease can no longer be ignored.

“Now is the time to take action on kidney disease,” Mr Forbes said.

“The health system can’t keep up with the cost and number of people needing treatment for kidney failure, and those people are paying dearly with limited access to treatment, especially in rural areas, resulting in unacceptable impacts on their health and wellbeing.”

A 2023 **Deloitte Access Economics Report** outlined the economic and human cost of kidney disease in Australia, identifying that kidney disease costs our Australian economy over \$9.9 billion per year, and showed that the number of kidney failure cases has doubled in the last 20 years and are projected to increase a further 43% by 2030.

“The Deloitte Report showed that for every \$1 invested in early detection and management of kidney disease, \$45 in health system costs can be saved, as well as 38,200 fewer deaths and 237,324 fewer hospitalisations,” Mr Forbes said.

“Kidney disease is twice as common as diabetes and kills more people than breast cancer yet is severely underfunded, leaving the kidney community feeling abandoned.

We’re at a critical point. Doing nothing is not an option, especially when there are simple solutions and new treatments that can dramatically change people’s lives.

Across Australia, access to critical haemodialysis treatment, that literally keeps thousands of Aussies alive, is often full or difficult to access”.

Mr Forbes said people needing dialysis often drove for hours for life preserving dialysis, having to pass by closer treatment centres because they were full.

“People do this while being extremely unwell – in some cases, people are forced to uproot their lives and move to the city to access treatment, leaving behind community, family and everything familiar. It is unacceptable.”

“While more dialysis chairs will help in the short term, this is not a long-term solution. The issue is systemic and needs to be addressed as a whole. Early detection and treatment of Chronic Kidney Disease before people reach kidney failure is the only way to get in front of this insidious disease.”

“The number of people with kidney failure will keep growing at a rate our health system can't keep up with, unless we focus on early detection and treatment now,” Mr Forbes said.

Rathika Krishnasamy, ANZSN President, added, “We have simple measures to detect kidney disease and new interventions to address the silent epidemic of chronic kidney disease. Now is the crucial time to focus on early detection and prevention of kidney disease.”

Mr Forbes said the new Parliamentary Friends of Kidney Health can provide a crucial voice for kidney patients into our nation’s policy makers and immediately push for early detection and management of kidney disease so that the 1.8 million Aussies unaware they have signs of kidney disease could access earlier intervention and improve their health outcomes.

“We need to slow down the number of people reaching kidney failure and needing dialysis, because once their kidneys fail, there’s no going back.

What’s encouraging is there are solutions, including medications that can slow or even prevent progression of kidney disease. With support from the federal government, Kidney Health Australia can tackle this incurable disease and make sure that treatments reach the people who need them most,” added Mr Forbes.

Peter Murko, who has been living with kidney failure since the 1980s and had three kidney transplants with years of dialysis in between, says “Dialysis is a necessary evil. It’s highly invasive and you are literally a prisoner on life support.”

“Both my children, who also have kidney disease, were on dialysis at home, and while that has some advantages, it meant no outings whatsoever past 5pm. The restrictions on life are extremely isolating, taking a very heavy physical and mental toll on everyone.”

While kidney transplantation is considered the gold standard treatment for kidney failure – it is not a cure. Many people with kidney failure are not eligible for a transplant and more Australians are waiting for a kidney transplant than for all the other organs combined.

With demand so much higher than supply for kidney transplantation and dialysis at capacity, the solution has to be early intervention, stopping progression to kidney failure.

“Early detection provides a safeguard for our community and eases pressure on our health system and most importantly, it gives people with kidney disease the priceless gift of time to enjoy life and be with loved ones,” Mr Forbes said.

KEY STATISTICS

- Kidney disease is so common that it affects 10% of the population worldwide (800M people) and is set to become the world’s fifth leading cause of death by 2040.
- Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) affects more than 2 million Australians – that’s one in every 10 Australian adults – yet it is often unknown and under-diagnosed, with 90% of people unaware they are living with CKD.
- CKD costs the Australian economy \$9.9 billion each year including \$2.3 billion to our healthcare system – a cost that can be greatly reduced if we diagnose kidney disease

earlier. For every \$1 invested in earlier detection and treatment of kidney disease, there is \$45 saving to the health system

- CKD is a disease of inequality that disproportionately impacts the most disadvantaged Australians, affecting those in the lowest socioeconomic groups and in outer regional and remote areas at much higher rates.
- The burden of CKD has a large impact on First Nations Australians.
 - First Nations peoples are twice as likely to have CKD and 4 times as likely to die from CKD than non-indigenous Australians.
 - First Nations peoples are often diagnosed with CKD at a younger age and progress faster to kidney failure.
- Living with CKD has a profound impact on the health and quality of life of Australians, with those on dialysis reliant on a machine to keep them alive.
- Up to 25% of people with CKD and up to 50% of those on dialysis will experience depression.
- Australians undergoing dialysis spend an average of 60 hours per month connected to a machine that cleans their blood.
- Australians can wait between 5 to 7 years for a kidney transplant through the donor registry.
- On average 73 Australians die per day with chronic kidney disease (more than breast and prostate cancer and road accidents).
- Early detection of CKD will save lives, reduce pressure on the hospital system and improve productivity.

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Kidney Health Australia is the recognised voice for kidney disease in Australia, creating a healthier community through increased awareness and early detection of kidney disease. Kidney Health Australia connects kidney consumers to vital resources and services to help them manage their condition and achieve a better quality of life. They work with health professionals and researchers to develop better treatments so that one day, every Australian will have healthy kidneys.

To find out more visit kidney.org.au/change