**Heart Foundation data shows which groups have the healthiest hearts in Australia**

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When it comes to heart health, where you live appears to matter as much as how you live, according to the Heart Foundation.

Its analysis of hospital and health data found those living in Sydney's wealthiest areas – north Sydney, northern beaches and eastern suburbs – have some of the nation's healthiest hearts, while those in regional and remote areas have some of the worst.

"Better heart health is associated with good education, reliable and secure employment, safe and affordable housing, accessible transport, affordable and healthy and food, and culturally appropriate health services and social support," said Adjunct Professor John Kelly, chief executive of the Heart Foundation.

"You get that in north Sydney, Hornsby and eastern suburbs, but you don't get that in the mid-north coast, far west and Orana, New England, north-west or Riverina."

It said NSW was "increasingly divided" with nine of the 20 worst regions in Australia for obesity and nine of the 20 worst regions for smoking in regional and rural areas of the state, with far west and Orana topping a list.

Deaths from heart disease are 50 per cent higher in Australia's poorest areas and 60 per cent higher in rural and remote areas, compared to that in affluent, metropolitan areas.

These areas tend to have higher rates of smoking and obesity – two major factors for heart disease.

The researchers estimated that if every community had the same admission rate as the nation's most advantaged areas, heart disease and heart failure admissions as a whole would fall by about 28 per cent.

It said that in Queensland, the figure would be closer to 40 per cent, and in the Northern Territory, by a massive 70 per cent.

Professor Kelly said all Australians should have the opportunity to make choices that allow them to live a healthy life, regardless of who they are or where they live.

"We need the Commonwealth and state government to work together to establish heart health checks by GPs, particularly in rural and regional Australia," he said.

"Secondly, we need an education program to make sure people recognise the symptoms of heart attacks so they know how to act, and thirdly, if you have had a heart attack, you need access to cardiac rehabilitation … which can improve recovery and prevent a second heart event."

On a national level, the data also shows NT has the highest rate of heart disease deaths, heart-related hospital admissions and smoking compared to other states and territories and the Queensland outback has the highest heart disease death rate of any region, with a rate almost twice that of the Sunshine Coast.

Tracy Howe, chief executive of NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) said the figures confirmed what its members have long claimed – that a person's suburb, financial situation and even cultural identity plays too large a role in their health outcomes.

"Regional communities told us childhood obesity is one of their main health concerns," she said.

"From Coffs Harbour, to Kiama, to Wagga Wagga, we heard that a lack of accessible, affordable healthy food, nutrition education and public 'green spaces' are key barriers to families being able to lead healthy, active lives."

She said accessible and affordable transport was another key priority, particularly for those suffering from chronic disease who require regular access to services and treatment.

"NCOSS continues to advocate for more government investment in regional transport responses, particularly in far west and western NSW," she said.

NSW Health said it recognised the burden of heart disease and was committed to reducing this by addressing obesity and smoking.

It acknowledged "there are differences" between population groups, and it had programs and strategies, such as its "Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service" to reduce the gap.

"This is a free telephone-based health coaching service that has helped more than 40,000 people, many of them in the categories most at need, including those in the lowest quintiles of advantage, in regional and remote locations, and Aboriginal people," it said.

"People who complete the six-month program lose an average of 3.8 kilograms and 5.1 centimetres off their waist circumference."

This story was found at: ***http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/heart-foundation-data-shows-which-groups-have-the-healthiest-hearts-in-australia-20171009-gyx598.html***