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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Focus on women's health vital on World Health Day

The World Health Organisation has this year established high blood pressure as the theme for World Health Day. High blood pressure – also known as raised blood pressure or hypertension – increases the risk of heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure.

“High blood pressure and heart disease are still too often thought of as diseases that mostly effect men. This is just not true,” says Women's Health East CEO, Kristine Olaris.

Heart disease is the leading killer of Australian women. 90% of Australian women have at least one risk factor for heart disease. Australian women are almost four times more likely to die of heart disease than breast cancer.

The stereotype that heart disease only happens to middle-aged and older men is having a negative impact on outcomes for women in treatment and points to the wider need for a health system capable of addressing the different and specific health needs of men and women.

Research shows that women make up 53% of deaths from cardiovascular disease and that for every 64 male deaths due to stroke there are 100 female deaths.

Despite the very real impact of heart disease upon Australian women, healthcare expenditure on women with heart disease is 20% lower than that for men. On average \$321 is spent per person on men, with only \$261 spent on women.

“These statistics are a clear reminder of the ongoing need for women's health specific services,” says Ms Olaris. “On World Health Day, it's important that we recognise that when it comes to health, sex and gender matter. A universal approach doesn't work. We need a health system that is responsive to the specific needs and realities of women.”

The classic symptoms of a heart attack such as discomfort or pain in the centre of the chest or spreading to the shoulders, neck, jaw and/or arms in fact reflect the symptoms experienced by men. Many women experience specific symptoms that are different from men. These can include:

- Unusual fatigue
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or weakness in the shoulder, arms or all over the body
- Nausea and vomiting

If you think you may be having a heart attack, call 000 immediately.

Media enquiries contact Kristine Olaris, Chief Executive Officer, 8873 3700 or [kolaris@whe.org.au](mailto:kolaris@whe.org.au)

## Links

- Women and cardiovascular disease: Gender Impact Assessment, *Women's Health Victoria* <http://whv.org.au/publications-resources/publications-resources-by-topic/post/women-and-cardiovascular-disease-gender-impact-assessment/>
- Women and heart disease: Cardiovascular profile of women in Australia, *Heart Foundation*, <http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/women-heart-disease/Pages/women-heart-disease-reports.aspx>

## About Women's Health East [www.whe.org.au](http://www.whe.org.au)

*Women's Health East* is a regional women's health promotion agency working across the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Melbourne. A not-for-profit agency funded primarily by the Victorian *Department of Health*, we advocate for gender equity and work to support the women and girls of the EMR to live the lives they want. Our health promotion priorities include:

- Preventing violence against women
- Promoting mental health & wellbeing and
- Enhancing sexual & reproductive rights



*Women's Health East* acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.