



Tuesday, May 17, 2022 | Wellington

## **Stroke Foundation's free blood pressure checks coming to a PAK'nSAVE carpark near you**

For immediate release

Tuesday, May 17th is World Hypertension Day and signals the start of the Stroke Foundation's annual Big Blood Pressure Check Road Trip, during which communities around the North Island can look forward to a visit from the Foundation's Health Promotion team, equipped to screen for high blood pressure and hypertension. Anyone is welcome to visit the mobile units and get a free check.

Up to one-fifth of New Zealanders have high blood pressure, which is a leading contributor to stroke. Some people can go years without knowing they're suffering from high blood pressure as it often has no symptoms.

"When we talk about strokes being avoidable, this is our primary concern," says Jo Lambert, Chief Executive of the Stroke Foundation. "High blood pressure can be controlled, but only if people know they have it, otherwise they carry the risk of stroke with them constantly."

Over the last decade, the Stroke Foundation has carried out up to 20,000 free community blood pressure checks every year.

"Every time we visit a community, as many as 3% of the people we test are at high risk of stroke. That's 300 people for every 10,000 people we screen, that are in hypertensive crisis. A hypertensive crisis is when high blood pressure is so acute that someone is in critical danger of experiencing a stroke." says Lambert.

"In addition, as many as one-third of people we test have higher than normal blood pressure readings and are unaware of any potential future risk," she added.

High blood pressure is more common in Māori, Pacific Islanders and Asians, with these population groups experiencing more strokes. The Stroke Foundation would like to see as many people during the Road Trip as possible and is encouraging whānau to visit together.

As many as 2,000 New Zealanders die from stroke every year (2018), and a stroke is experienced every hour in New Zealand.

"Our aim is to get this number down," says Jo. "Routine blood pressure checks need to increase significantly if we are ever to reduce the number of devastating strokes in Aotearoa."

Jo says that once people know they have high blood pressure, they can access tools and support to make key lifestyle decisions, seek medical help, and get medication if they need it.

"Without this critical piece of health information, many New Zealanders are oblivious to the danger they face. For some people, this is because of barriers to healthcare services and inequitable access.

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**Charities Commission number CC49490**

Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for people to receive a free blood pressure check, and that is the whole idea behind the Road Trip.”

The vans, which are sponsored by Ryman Healthcare, will be on the road for 8 weeks and, in partnership with Foodstuffs NZ, will be visiting PAK’nSAVE supermarkets across the North Island. Upcoming dates of sites are regularly updated here – [www.stroke.org.nz/big-blood-pressure-check-vans](http://www.stroke.org.nz/big-blood-pressure-check-vans)

## He Taonga

Feedback from people who have received free blood pressure checks has led to the development of He Taonga by the Stroke Foundation. This online tool promotes hauora (wellbeing) and provides support to help people avoid the risks of stroke, particularly once they have been made aware of the connection between blood pressure and stroke.

It has been specifically designed to address health inequities for Māori. He Taonga is a free resource that makes use of weekly emails and informative videos to encourage people to develop health and wellness habits that contribute to lowering blood pressure and reducing their risk of stroke.

“Anyone can use the tool, but we have built it with Māori firmly at the centre,” says Nita Brown, National Māori Health Advisor.

More information about the free tool can be found here - [www.stroke.org.nz/he-taonga](http://www.stroke.org.nz/he-taonga)

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## Sources

- Ministry of Health (2018) Mortality (numbers and rates) from common causes of death by sex and ethnicity.

## Notes to editors

- While stroke is the leading cause of disability and the second-biggest single cause of death in New Zealand for all adults, Indigenous, and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately impacted.
- Ultimately, 75% of all strokes are preventable and high blood pressure is the leading risk factor for stroke, that is modifiable.
- According to the latest population statistics, there could be more than 1 million New Zealanders living with high blood pressure.
- Recent research estimates a third of people with high blood pressure, between 300,000 to 400,000 people, are unaware that they are at increased risk of stroke.
- Māori and Pacific adults are more likely to be diagnosed with high blood pressure than non-Māori and non-Pacific adults.
- Diets high in salt are a leading cause of high blood pressure, with New Zealanders estimated to eat double the recommended amount of salt in their daily diet. Other common causes of high blood pressure include being overweight, smoking, drinking too much alcohol, not exercising and diabetes.

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**About the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand**

The Stroke Foundation is a national charity in New Zealand focused on the prevention of and recovery from stroke. For over 40 years we have actively promoted ways to avoid stroke and dedicated ourselves to working closely with stroke survivors across the country. The generosity of New Zealanders enables us to help thousands of stroke survivors every year; providing them with critical services to ensure the best possible outcomes – not just for themselves, but also to their family/whanau and carers. To find out more about the Stroke Foundation, go to [www.stroke.org.nz](http://www.stroke.org.nz)