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Region's 'silent disease' concern

HEALTH

BY STEFF WILLS

Region

HEART disease has been labelled a "silent killer" in the south-west with hospital admission rates the seventh highest in the state, Heart Foundation figures show.

A study found regional and rural Victorians more likely to be taken to suffer conditions relating to heart attack, heart failure and angina.

Clinical Council Primary Health Network chair Dale Ford said this report did not come as a surprise with many people having "a general awareness" of the issue.

"Data has shown risk factors for coronary-artery disease and cardio-vascular disease have been higher in south-west Victoria than other areas," he said.

He said years of research had highlighted significant risk factors throughout the community.

The Heart Foundation's study found hospital admis-

sions to be above the state average for heart-related admissions with the south-west ranked the 44th highest in Australia.

Dr Ford said a study 10 years ago - by the Greater Green Triangle University Department of Rural Health - found high risks of high-blood pressure, cholesterol and obesity.

"These new rates indicate that there is still a lot of work to do," he said. "It's a much more silent disease than others."

The Hamilton GP said there were a number of things that could be done to address the high-rates of heart-disease.

"They come down to adequate exercise, diet, education at schools and policies in local government that will help to reduce this risk," he said.

Dr Ford said encouraged patients over 40 and indigenous people over 30 to ask their GP or visit <http://www.cvdcheck.org.au/> to discover

their risk.

"You need to know your own numbers," he said.

Heart Foundation Victoria chief executive Kellie-Ann Jolly said the results mapped a national picture of the hospital admission rates and risk-factor data across Australia. She said those living in "hotspots" were found to be disadvantaged due to education, housing, employment and social support access.

"Victoria has the third lowest rate of hospital admissions for heart conditions in Australia, but we still have challenges due to the inequality across the state," Ms Jolly said. "It shouldn't matter where you live... all Victorians are entitled to access services that prevent heart disease."