

A good CHAP reduces rates of heart disease and stroke in communities

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A community-based health promotion program delivered by over 500 peer volunteers significantly reduces heart disease and stroke in seniors, Canadian Stroke Network researcher Dr. Janusz Kaczorowski told the Canadian Stroke Congress today.

As part of the Cardiovascular Health Awareness Program (CHAP), family physicians in 20 mid-sized Ontario communities invited patients aged 65 and over to attend risk assessment sessions held at local pharmacies over a 10 week period.

Over 15,000 residents took part in the program.

"Volunteer-led risk assessments combined with health information and linkages to primary care providers and community resources led to an impressive nine percent reduction in their rates of hospitalization for stroke, heart attack, and [congestive heart failure](#)," says Dr. Kaczorowski, from the University of British Columbia and the Child and Family Research Institute.

The Program, co-developed by Drs. Kaczorowski, Lisa Dolovich, and Larry Chambers from McMaster University and the Elisabeth Bruyere Research Institute, received the Canadian Stroke Congress Chair's Award for Impact, awarded to the research study presented at Congress which was judged to have the most impact on preventing or treating stroke.

The CHAP team randomly selected 39 communities and stratified them by location and population size. Twenty communities received CHAP. Nineteen communities served as controls and did not receive the program.

In the CHAP communities, over 500 trained peer volunteers met with the residents to check blood pressure, review the warning signs of stroke and heart attack, look at risk factors, and promote [blood pressure control](#) and healthy living.

"CHAP is a unique, low cost way to activate community organizations, volunteers, health care providers, and the participants themselves," says Dr. Kaczorowski.

Pharmacists were onsite as part of the primary care team to discuss concerns about blood pressure medications and recommendations on how to maximize the benefits of blood pressure lowering medications.

The program focused primarily on blood pressure reduction.

"Controlling blood pressure is key to lowering rates of stroke and heart disease," says Dr. Kaczorowski. "We found that even small reductions can have a dramatic impact on the health of older adults." According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, one in five Canadian adults has high blood pressure.

With the largest cohort of baby boomers in Canada's history entering their at-risk years, Dr. Kaczorowski says that the next steps will be to roll out the program across Canada.

"It's never too late to reduce your risk of stroke, and this project is showing us how quickly the benefits of [blood pressure](#) management can accrue," says Canadian Stroke Network spokesperson Dr. Antoine Hakim. "Good health isn't just for the young; it's a life-long pursuit."

He notes that simple solutions can lead to big results: "Here is a prevention strategy that doesn't require large health expenditures but has significant impact on health outcomes. It's worth pursuing this peer model with other at-risk populations such as youth and the Aboriginal population."

The 2010 Heart and Stroke Foundation report card recently warned that a 'perfect storm' of risk factors and demographic changes are creating an unprecedented burden on Canada's fragmented cardiovascular care system.

"We currently have a patchwork quilt of prevention and treatment initiatives," says Heart and [Stroke](#) Foundation spokesperson Dr. Michael Hill. "Community programs like CHAP are integral to helping individuals within at-risk populations understand and manage their health risks."

Provided by Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

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