

Heart condition twice as common in Indigenous people

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Research from the University of Adelaide shows Indigenous Australians suffer from a serious heart rhythm disorder twice as commonly as non-Indigenous people.

A study in the University's Centre for Heart Rhythm Disorders is the first of its kind to detail the prevalence of atrial fibrillation among Indigenous Australians.

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is characterised by an abnormal beating of the heart. It is an increasingly common heart rhythm disorder and associated with a risk of stroke, heart failure and death.

Researchers studied the data of more than 200,000 people managed at the Royal Adelaide Hospital over a 10-year period in South Australia. The results, published in the journal *BMJ Open*, show that Indigenous Australians diagnosed with atrial fibrillation were significantly younger, with an average age of 55 years compared with 75 years for non-Indigenous Australians.

"In patients aged under 60 years, Indigenous Australians had double the rate of atrial fibrillation compared with non-Indigenous Australians," says lead author Dr Christopher Wong, from the University of Adelaide's Centre for Heart Rhythm Disorders, the Royal Adelaide Hospital and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI).

"We confirmed the results of previous studies showing that Indigenous Australians develop other cardiovascular diseases and at a younger age. Our study now shows, however, that atrial fibrillation can be added to the list of conditions contributing to the greater burden of death and disease being experienced by Indigenous Australians," Dr Wong says.

"To the best of our knowledge, this is the first assessment of atrial fibrillation in Indigenous Australians. This is important to know as the complications of atrial fibrillation can be reduced with appropriate management."

Dr Wong says another issue identified by the study is the fact that Indigenous people with AF had significantly larger diameters of the left atrium in the heart, and greater rates of dysfunction in the left ventricle.

"These differences in cardiac structure and function may in-part explain the excessive prevalence of AF seen in younger Indigenous people which is likely to be contributing to the disparity in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians," he says.

"Based on this study, we now need to see whether strategies to prevent and manage [atrial fibrillation](#) can help to reduce the burden of this condition seen in Indigenous Australians."

More information: "Atrial fibrillation in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: a cross-sectional study." *BMJ Open* 2014;4:e006242 [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-006242](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2014-006242)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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