



Press Release

17 June 2025

## **Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa commemorates Employee Wellness Week 1 - 6 July 2025: Focus on the Workforce this Winter**

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) is proud to commemorate Employee Wellness Week (EWW) from 1st to 6th July 2025. This annual initiative recognizes the vital role employees play in driving business success, and acknowledges the hard work and dedication they bring to their organizations every day. EWW encourages employers in the private and public sectors to prioritize the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of their employees. Adopting a holistic approach to wellness has a direct and indirect impact on workplace productivity, in reducing absenteeism, and creating a positive workplace environment. Partnering with, or requesting the services of the Foundation can help workplaces demonstrate their commitment to employee health and well-being.

Throughout the first week of July, our campaign focuses on creating awareness in both the private and public sectors about the positive impact of maintaining good health and wellbeing in the workplace, of which heart and brain health, as well as the associated risk factors, are our main focus areas. Our employee wellness program yields good health and productivity in the workplace as it offers relevant tools and information towards disease prevention and maintenance of good health. The HSFSA's employee wellness program is multifaceted and covers all aspects of self care and wellbeing through health talks, health risk assessments, individual counselling, mental state assessments and referral for medical attention where indicated, with a bias in favour of cardiovascular disease.

The health promotion and health risk assessment program team, Nutrition Science team and other professional staff conduct health talks, to disseminate evidence-based health information, and advocate for healthy behavioural choices to reduce the risk of Non -Communicable Diseases (NCDs). These behavioural choices include healthy food choices, sustained regular activity, maintaining good mental and physical health, stopping excessive alcohol use and tobacco smoking and vaping, and treatment adherence for existing health conditions. Conducting health risk assessments for employees allows each individual to know their current

health state, such as blood pressure and glucose levels, so that they can take the necessary steps if they are found to be at risk.

The HSFSA urges all employers to join hands in the fight against cardiovascular disease (CVD) by utilizing our Employee Wellness Program, which will afford employees the opportunity to know their important health numbers (such as their blood pressure measure) and try to maintain good health. Our health risk assessment includes blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol, body mass index testing and health information leaflets that will assist all individuals to navigate through their healthy living journey. Prof. Pamela Naidoo, CEO, of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa highlights the significance of workplace wellness initiatives, stating that incorporating designated wellness days is a crucial step towards prioritizing employee health. Prof Naidoo states that older persons are more vulnerable to ill health during the winter season and it is therefore very important to engage in disease prevention. Our CEO urges workplaces to contact the Foundation if they would like our staff to conduct an EWP, and in particular conduct health risk assessments by our Health Promotions and Health Risk Assessment Teams.

Seasonal variations significantly impact cardiovascular disease (CVD) morbidity and mortality, with higher incidence rates in winter and lower rates in summer. This pattern affects individuals across age groups, with the elderly being particularly vulnerable due to decreased physiological resilience, comorbidities, and potential social isolation. Factors contributing to seasonal variations in CVD include temperature fluctuations, reduced physical activity, vitamin D deficiency, increased blood pressure, and respiratory infections like influenza. Specifically, conditions such as hypertension, heart failure, and atrial fibrillation exhibit seasonal patterns, with hospitalization rates for heart failure notably peaking in winter. Environmental factors, including cold temperatures and air pollution, further exacerbate these risks. To mitigate these risks, targeted awareness campaigns and prevention strategies should focus on promoting healthy habits, ensuring proper heating and insulation, and facilitating access to healthcare services, particularly for high-risk populations like the elderly, during the winter months.

Our employee wellness program promotes healthy eating habits through initiatives like the HSFSA's Heart Mark programme. This trusted food endorsement initiative empowers consumers to make informed choices by identifying products that meet rigorous nutritional standards. Heart Mark-approved products are lower in salt, sugar, saturated and total fats, and higher in fiber. With approval from the National Department of Health and recognition by 8 out of 10 adults, the Heart Mark is a credible symbol of healthy eating. Our nutrition science team, including our Registered Dietitians Ms. Shonisani Nephalama and Ms. Cari Erasmus, endorses Heart Mark as a valuable guide for making informed food choices, helping employees and their families adopt healthier eating habits. By supporting

Heart Mark-approved products, we encourage employers and employees to make healthier choices and reduce their risk of heart disease and strokes.

Interviews will be conducted with our Health Promotions Programme Team, Dietitians and CEO, Professor Pamela Naidoo. To co-ordinate and confirm interview dates you are welcome to contact Themba Mzondi, our PR and Communications Officer on 021 422 1586 / 0781135216 or email [themba.mzondi@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:themba.mzondi@heartfoundation.co.za)

### **About the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA**

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) plays a leading role in the fight against preventable heart disease and stroke, with the aim of seeing fewer people in South Africa suffer premature deaths and disabilities. The HSFSA, established in 1980 is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which relies on external funding to sustain the work it carries out.

The HSFSA aims to reduce the cardiovascular disease (CVD) burden in South Africa and ultimately on the health care system of South Africa. Our mission is to empower people in South Africa to adopt healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices easier, seek appropriate care and encourage prevention.

For more information visit [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za). You can also find us on [www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA](https://www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA), [www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke](https://www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke) and [www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa](https://www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa)

