

**Queensland State Committee  
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons  
Leckhampton Offices Level 2 59-69 Shafston Avenue  
Kangaroo Point QLD Australia 4169**

Dr Stephen Lambert  
Medical Director, Epidemiology & Research Unit  
Queensland Health

[stephen.lambert@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:stephen.lambert@health.qld.gov.au)

#### **RE: Rheumatic Heart Disease – Notifiable condition**

As the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is committed to taking informed and principled positions on issues of public health at both state and federal level.

#### **Rheumatic Heart Disease**

Rheumatic heart disease is a complication of rheumatic fever in which the heart valves are damaged. Rheumatic fever is an inflammatory disease that begins with strep throat. It can affect connective tissue throughout the body, especially in the heart, joints, brain and skin.

The disease is prominent in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as referred below from the World Heart Federations website fact sheet. \* World Heart Federation Fact Sheet–May 2017 retrieved from <http://www.world-heart-federation.org/press/fact-sheets/rheumatic-heart-disease/>

#### **Rheumatic heart disease facts**

- The global burden of disease caused by rheumatic fever and RHD currently falls disproportionately on children and young adults living in low-income countries and is responsible for about 233,000 deaths annually.
- At least 15.6 million people are estimated to be currently affected by RHD with a significant number of them requiring repeated hospitalization and, often unaffordable, heart surgery in the next five to 20 years.
- The worst affected areas are sub-Saharan Africa, south-central Asia, the Pacific and indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand.
- Up to 1 per cent of all schoolchildren in Africa, Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean region, and Latin America show signs of the disease.

The Queensland Regional Committee for RACS is aware that there is some interface with this disease within its membership. This is primarily amongst Cardiothoracic Surgeons and also more generally among some of our regional surgeons, in particular Cairns. Surgeons do travel to rural areas under various outreach services and may have some exposure to this disease.

The College recognises the burden this disease places on the community and further recognises that it is a clear marker of social disadvantage and poverty. We are entirely supportive of rheumatic heart disease (RHD) as a clinically notifiable condition in Queensland. This will give further impetus to eradicating this disease and closing the gap in indigenous care.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian McGowan', is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

**Brian McGowan**

**Chair Queensland Regional Committee**