Coronary heart disease (CHD) occurs when there is a blockage in the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle. There are 2 major clinical forms of CHD: heart attack—an acute life-threatening event where the blood vessel is completely blocked, requiring prompt treatment; and angina—a chronic condition where there is a temporary deficiency in the blood supply.

The impact of coronary heart disease

- In 2011–12, an estimated 585,900 Australians had CHD, with the condition being more common in men (3.3%) than women (2.0%) and among those aged 70 and over (15% compared with 2.2% for those aged 25–69) (ABS 2013).
- In 2011, an estimated 69,900 people aged 25 and over had a heart attack. There has been a 20% fall in heart attack rates over the last 5 years

Deaths

- In 2011, there were 21,500 deaths with CHD recorded as the underlying cause of death.
- CHD contributed to 15% of all deaths in Australia and almost 1 in 2 cardiovascular disease deaths.
- The burden of CHD is greater in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than in other Australians—rates of heart attack events in adults aged 25 and over were 2.6 times as high in 2011.
- CHD death rates have fallen by 73% over the last 3 decades; however, the rate of decline has varied over time and across age groups.

Classroom discussion

What are some factors that can be attributed to the significant reductions in CHD deaths?

[Hint: See page 126 Australia’s health 2014 report]