

WORLD HEART DAY

A GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF ACTION AND AWARENESS

SUMMARY

World Heart Day, held annually on 29 September, is a global campaign led by the World Heart Federation (WHF) to raise awareness about cardiovascular disease (CVD)—the world’s leading cause of death. The idea was first introduced by WHF President Dr. Antoni Bayés de Luna during his tenure and launched in 1999 with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO. The first official World Heart Day was celebrated in 2000, coinciding with the Sydney Olympic Games, with the inaugural slogan “Let it Beat,” emphasizing the importance of physical activity in preventing heart disease and stroke.

Initially marked on the last Sunday of September, the observance moved to a fixed date—29 September—starting in 2011, helping to establish a consistent global presence. Each year, WHF leads the campaign by coordinating outreach efforts, developing educational resources, and engaging a broad network of Members and global partners. World Heart Day now serves as a unifying global movement that mobilizes individuals and communities to take action for better heart health.

ORIGINS OF WORLD HEART DAY



Figure 1. Members of the World Heart Federation. In 2000 they approved the "World Heart Day" campaign in the city of Vic, Spain. From left to right: Tak-Fu-Tse, Marianne Burle de Figueiredo, John Chalmers; Antoni Bayes de Luna; Darwin R Labarthe and Leslie Busk.

The concept of ‘World Heart Day’ was first proposed by renowned cardiologist Dr. Antoni

Bayés de Luna, during his tenure as President of the World Heart Federation from 1997 to 1999. By the end of 1998, following consultations with WHF's global network of Members and partners, it was agreed to observe World Heart Day every year on the last Sunday of September.

The first official campaign was launched in September 2000, strategically aligned with the Sydney Olympic Games, under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Sophia of Spain and Juan Antonio Samaranch, then President of the International Olympic Committee. The inaugural theme, "Let it Beat," celebrated the role of physical activity in maintaining a healthy heart. From 2011 onward, World Heart Day has been observed on the fixed date of 29 September, further strengthening its identity and global recognition.

TIMELINE OF KEY MILESTONES

24 September 2000 – First World Heart Day: Launched on the last Sunday of September with the theme "Let it Beat," promoting physical activity for heart health. Events were held in Barcelona with the assistance of prominent figures, including the soprano Montserrat Caballe and the flamenco dancer Joaquim Cortes.

2001–2004 – Broadening the message: In 2003, the campaign spotlighted "Women and Heart Disease," confronting widespread gender misconceptions about cardiovascular risk. The following year, in 2004, the focus turned to younger generations with the theme "Children, Adolescents and Heart Disease," partnering with UEFA to encourage physical activity through the universal language of football.

Late-2000s – Global expansion: Themes such as "Know Your Risk" in 2008 and "Work with Heart" in 2009 highlighted the importance of personal risk awareness and promoting wellness in the workplace. In 2011, World Heart Day established 29 September as its fixed date to ensure consistency.

2011–2017 – Community empowerment: Over the decade, national heart organizations, health ministries, civil society, and the private sector increasingly broadened their engagement. Themes like "Take the Road to a Healthy Heart" (2013), "Creating Heart-Healthy Environments" (2014), and "Share the Power" (2017) empowered individuals to take control of their health and influence their communities.

2018-2019 – "Heart Heroes" and personal commitment: The campaign theme "My Heart, Your Heart" encouraged individuals to become **Heart Heroes**, making personal promises to eat healthier, exercise more, quit smoking, and help others do the same.

2020 – Adapting in a pandemic: In response to pandemic-related health gaps, WHF launched the "Use Heart" series. The theme "Use Heart to Beat CVD" emphasized using compassion, knowledge, and digital tools to maintain heart health during uncertain times. Messaging

underscored the vulnerability of heart patients to COVID-19, making the campaign more relevant than ever.

2021–2022 – Connection and equity: In 2021, “**Use Heart to Connect**” promoted digital health and social connection, and in **2022**, “**Use Heart for Every Heart**” championed equity, calling for accessible heart care and heart-healthy environments for all.

2024 and beyond – From awareness to action: With “**Use Heart for Action**,” World Heart Day entered a new phase. The **2024 campaign** launched a **global advocacy drive** urging policy change and national heart health strategies. WHF introduced the first **petition calling for cardiovascular health plans**, collecting hundreds of thousands of signatures and achieving record participation in **110+ countries**. This milestone marked a transition from raising awareness to **mobilizing real policy change**—a bold step toward a heart-healthy future for all.

GROWTH AND IMPACT OF WORLD HEART DAY (2020–2024)

Between 2020 and 2024, World Heart Day has grown exponentially in scope, reach, and influence, becoming one of the most impactful global health campaigns focused on cardiovascular disease awareness.

In 2020, the campaign engaged 72 million people on social media, with over 35,000 resources downloaded. By 2021, the social media reach surged dramatically to over 1 billion and member activations grew to 91. This marked a major expansion in both scale and engagement.

The growth continued steadily in 2022 and 2023. Resource downloads remained high while Member activations increased from 106 in 2022 to 115 in 2023. The campaign’s reach expanded further to 1.27 billion people in 2023, reflecting increased global visibility and influence.

In 2024, World Heart Day sustained its impressive momentum—reaching over 1.1 billion people and attracting more than 1.15 million website visits. Member activations reached 124, the highest to date, and advocacy efforts culminated in over 30,000 petition signatures demanding stronger cardiovascular health policies.

This trajectory from millions reached annually, alongside consistent growth in partner and Member engagement, demonstrates its evolution from an awareness event to a powerful global movement driving education, advocacy, and action against cardiovascular disease.