

Media Release

Inquiry into the Impact of Epilepsy in Australia – Recommendations Released

Recommendations from the first-ever Parliamentary Friends of Epilepsy *Informal Inquiry into the Impact of Epilepsy in Australia*, held on 30 November 2009, in Canberra, have been released. The Inquiry was held after a concerted lobbying effort by the Joint Epilepsy Council of Australia (JECA) to parliamentary representatives who have an interest in epilepsy.

Denise Chapman, Executive Officer of JECA and Executive Officer of Epilepsy Australia, said members of JECA were heartened the Parliamentary Friends of Epilepsy recognised the significance of epilepsy as a health condition of national concern and had taken the necessary steps to convene a national inquiry that would investigate strategies for improving outcomes for people with epilepsy.

She said the members concurred with the recommendations contained in the report, particularly regarding employment access, and funding for projects such as research and awareness-raising.

“Many people with epilepsy, particularly severe, uncontrolled epilepsy, struggle to achieve equal opportunities in life, whether in education, employment or access to health services,” Ms Chapman said. “JECA together with Epilepsy Australia, as the nation’s peak consumer-led epilepsy body, and its state-based member organisations that provide services on-the-ground, are pleased to see that government has recognised that access to employment support services within government agencies is crucial in giving people with epilepsy opportunities to gain paid employment.”

“We are also pleased to see acknowledgement of the need for increased funding for initiatives such as awareness-raising campaigns, to reduce the ignorance and stigma associated with epilepsy, which can be a further major impediment to receiving a fair go in life, and for new research. In particular, we believe it is critical to have current data available, via the National Health Survey, on Australian demographics of people with epilepsy, as well as the incidence, diagnosis and treatment, rather than relying on extrapolation of overseas data. This will help local service providers to tailor services to meet real needs in line with growing demand in certain age groups.”

“Epilepsy Australia’s state-based member organisations are already working to develop and implement projects in line with a number of the key recommendations.”

Ms Chapman said it was pleasing to note that more than 360 submissions to the Inquiry were received. “Submissions were made by many people with epilepsy, their families and carers, as well as service providers, medical practitioners, specialists and others working in the epilepsy sector – a very high number for an Inquiry of this type, indicating the depth of interest in, and concern for, the condition and those who are affected by it.”

3-4% percent of Australians will have a diagnosis of epilepsy during their lifetime (650,000). The number of people significantly affected by epilepsy in Australia is therefore estimated to be approximately 2.6 million.

The 8th Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress, being held in Melbourne from 21-24 October 2010, will provide a focus for epilepsy with a full scientific program as well as featuring the Epilepsy & Society day program dealing with the individuals and epilepsy for the general public.

Further information:

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