



MEDIA RELEASE

Relief for pain sufferers in Queensland budget

Tuesday June 8, 2010

An injection of \$39.1 million over four years into persistent pain services in Queensland will have a huge positive impact on the people living with pain in that state, pain medicine specialists said today (Tuesday June 8, 2010).

"The Queensland Government is to be applauded for being the first in Australia to address arguably the biggest health issue in Australia today," said Brisbane pain medicine specialist, Associate Professor Leigh Atkinson.

"A staggering 576,000 Queenslanders – more than 12% of the population - are living with constant daily pain for three months or more and this number is likely to increase as the population ages. One in five will develop persistent pain at some stage in their lives.

"This funding will also have a big impact on the financial cost of pain to Queensland. Persistent pain costs the Australian economy \$34 billion annually which means the cost to Queensland is somewhere in the vicinity of \$6.8 billion in lost productivity and healthcare expenditure."

The funding of \$39.1 million in operational funds will be made over four years for the staged implementation of a hub and spoke persistent pain (also known as chronic pain) service network across Queensland.

The funding demonstrates the Queensland Government's strong support for the recommendations of the National Pain Strategy, released in April, following the National Pain Summit.

The Strategy which was developed by over 150 healthcare and consumer organisations, provides a blueprint for the prevention and management of persistent pain for all Australians.

The funding will build on Queensland's only existing dedicated pain service at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital by establishing persistent pain treatment pilot sites across the state in both metropolitan and regional areas.

"This will have a huge impact on waiting lists at the over-burdened pain clinic at the Royal Brisbane," Associate Professor Atkinson said. "It will also allow people in rural and regional areas – a sadly neglected group in the area of persistent pain - better access to pain services."

He said because pain often showed no physical signs, people – including health professionals – often did not believe people were in pain which is one of the reasons they were at such high risk of depression, anxiety, social isolation and relationship breakdown.

World-renowned pain expert Professor Michael Cousins said the Queensland Government had shown the way forward.

“Funding for pain services was a notable omission in the Federal budget,” Professor Cousins said. “Especially when we know we could save about half the \$34 billion in annual costs to the Australian economy through the application of evidence-based treatments within an effective policy framework.

“Let’s hope – for the sakes of the many millions of Australians suffering unnecessary pain – that the other states and territories, not to mention the Commonwealth, take Queensland’s lead.”

Professor Cousins chaired the recent National Pain Summit in Canberra aimed at elevating the priority given to the management of acute, chronic and cancer pain.

The Summit was led by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, Faculty of Pain Medicine, the Australian Pain Society and Chronic Pain Australia in collaboration with inaugural supporters’ MBF Foundation and the Pain Management Research Institute

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