



The Hon Mark Coulton MP
Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government

Media release

2 June 2021

Continuing support for Australia's polio survivors

More than \$400,000 has been invested by the Federal Government to continue support for polio survivors who have life-long impacts from the disease.

Tens of thousands of Australians survived the infection, and now endure the debilitating neurological condition, Late Effects of Polio (LEoP)/Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS).

Regional Health Minister and co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Polio Survivors, Mark Coulton said Australia had been declared free from new polio infections since 2000.

"Most polio survivors are now aged over 50, and LEOP or PPS can have significant and debilitating impacts on their lives," Minister Coulton said.

"Australians are fortunate that the successful polio vaccine was incorporated into our Australian National Immunisation Program in 1975. Within 25 years we had eradicated the deadly and disabling disease from our shores.

"We want to ensure the Australian survivors are supported to live fulfilling and healthy lives, so we have provided more than \$400,000 to continue Polio Australia's Community Information Program."

Minister Coulton said the program helps polio survivors to identify and better understand their condition, and the available strategies to manage that condition.

Gillian Thomas, national president of Polio Australia and a survivor of polio herself, said after a successful trial of community programs on a smaller scale, Polio Australia is thrilled to have the opportunity to increase its reach to the polio community across the country.

"Many people who had polio are unaware that symptoms they are now experiencing relate directly to that childhood infection. And they don't know who to see or what they can do to manage their own condition," Ms Thomas said.

"Our Community Information Sessions, printable resources and online engagement can help to bridge that gap."

PPS is a diagnosed neurological condition which can affect people who had paralytic polio in their younger years. The main symptom is muscle weakness that develops and gradually worsens.

People with LEOP/PPS can also experience general fatigue, muscle and joint pain, weakness and muscle atrophy, spasms or twitching, breathing and sleep problems, difficulties with swallowing and speaking, and cold intolerance.

Minister Coulton said as the survivors of polio age, health services must be ready and aware of the need to offer increased care for this group.

"Luck had a lot to do with many people surviving paralytic polio in years past. Now, as these survivors age, and for many their health deteriorates, they can depend more on skilful and knowledgeable health professionals to look after their care and health – and on their own self-management strategies - and less on luck," he said.