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POLIO AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED

Representing polio survivors throughout Australia

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MEDIA ALERT

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Discussion Paper on polio's legacy released

AFTER SPENDING decades in the political wilderness, Australia's polio survivors are finally being recognised in a paper which has just been released by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing following a public Roundtable Forum on the Late Effects of Polio (LEOP) and Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS) in March 2012.

The "*Discussion paper on the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome*" was presented out of session, and is still to be tabled in the House. An allocation of time will be sought to table the paper when the House resumes sitting in August, most likely scheduled for 20 August 2012.

As Australia's population ages, a growing number of polio survivors, once fully active members of society, are now experiencing new and debilitating symptoms due to Late Effects of Polio (LEOP) and Post Polio Syndrome (PPS). For example, some who walked independently must now use braces, crutches or wheelchairs and make changes to their work and home lives. Adding further weight to the needs of this still largely invisible community are the unrecorded numbers of new survivors who have migrated from developing countries where polio is either still endemic, or has only just recently been eradicated.

At the March Roundtable Forum, Polio Australia, a not-for-profit support organisation for polio survivors throughout the country, called for major investments into training the medical and allied health professions so they can effectively identify and treat LEOP and PPS.

Polio Australia President, Gillian Thomas, herself a survivor, said: "*We are very impressed with the depth of understanding that comes through the Discussion Paper and believe the three specific Recommendations made by the Committee are fully in accordance with Polio Australia's goal to alleviate the barriers faced by Australia's post polio community.*"

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The recommendations outlined in the Discussion paper are:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics and/or the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare establish mechanisms through inclusion of appropriate questions in existing health and/or disability surveys to estimate and report on the size of the population of polio survivors living in Australia, and the proportion of that population experiencing the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the relevant National Boards, in consultation with key stakeholders including peak professional bodies, medical/health educators and training providers, seek to ensure curricula for students includes information on the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome, to raise awareness of the condition as a possible diagnostic outcome and of best practice for treatment and management.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that Medicare Locals actively engage with Polio Australia and the state-based post-polio associations, with state and territory government departments of health, and with general practitioners to promote activities which will raise awareness of the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome:

- among practicing health professionals through continuing professional development; and
- in the community through patient education, noting the need to tailor communication to enhance engagement with specific population groups taking into account demographic factors such as age and cultural background.

Ms Thomas said, *"Whilst we are delighted that this Discussion paper highlights the issues faced by our post polio community, it is self evident that Polio Australia requires dedicated funding if we are to advance the strategies outlined in the Discussion Paper and to redress the problems faced by the tens of thousands of polio survivors living in Australia today."*

Ms Thomas continued, *"In the meantime, Polio Australia and the State Polio Networks will continue to do what we can within our limited human and financial resources for the health and wellbeing of Australia's significant post polio community."*

The "Discussion paper on the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome" can be viewed and downloaded from the House of Representatives Committee website:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=haa/leop%20pps/media.htm

Further information on Polio Australia's views can be viewed online here:

http://www.polioaustralia.org.au/?page_id=10491

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