

Committee reports on polio's lasting legacy

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A federal parliamentary committee has called for better estimates of Australia's polio survivors

Thousands of Australians may be suffering from the delayed effects of having polio without knowing it, a federal parliamentary committee has found.

It's a legacy from the days when Australia suffered epidemics of poliomyelitis, a potentially crippling and sometimes fatal viral infection.

It was wiped out in Australia by comprehensive vaccination programs starting in the late 1950s.

However, following a roundtable with health officials and polio groups, the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing has found that many years after the initial infection, an increasing number of survivors have developed a range of symptoms.

These include fatigue, muscle weakness and pain, respiratory and sleep problems, speaking and swallowing difficulties and intolerance to cold.

However, medical professionals have been slow to recognise it.

Liberal MP Steve Irons, the committee deputy chair, said there were no particular tests for the condition which could take up to six years to diagnose correctly.

The committee chair, Labor's Steve Georganas, said it was unclear how many were affected, but it was likely to be in the thousands, with many sufferers still unrecognised.

The committee has called for better estimates of the number of Australia's polio survivors and the proportion suffering late effects, and greater awareness of the condition among medical groups.

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