



Southwest Advocacy News

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CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Greetings to all members, clients and supporters of Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA) and welcome to another edition of our newsletter.

The accessibility of public transport continues to be a big issue for people with disabilities. SWAA recently made a submission to the Commonwealth Government's Review of Transport Standards under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). SWAA supported the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations' submission and some of the major points made in SWAA's submission are listed below.

- In general, transport services and supporting infrastructure continue to be far less accessible to people with disabilities than to other citizens in our society.
- Many public and private transport providers are not making sufficient progress toward meeting the DDA Transport Standards.
- Compliance with the DDA Transport Standards must be monitored and enforced by Government. A dedicated body with responsibility in this area should be established without delay.
- People with disabilities commonly put up with breaches or infringements of their rights under the DDA because they are not aware of their rights or find the system that they are required to use to enforce their rights far too time consuming, exhausting, and costly. The DDA

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should be reformed to make complaint resolution processes, quicker, simpler and less legalistic.

- There needs to a community education campaign funded by Government to make people with disabilities aware of their rights under the DDA and the Transport Standards.
- Levels of disability issues awareness amongst the staff of transport providers are generally very poor. A disability awareness training package for the staff of transport providers should be designed in consultation with relevant training providers and people with disabilities and this training should be mandatory for the staff of transport providers under the DDA Transport Standards.
- Transport service providers should be required to consult and negotiate with people with disabilities and independent advocacy organisations that represent people with disabilities prior to seeking an exemption from the DDA Transport Standards.
- Transport service providers should be required to establish disability consultative committees, that include people with disabilities and independent advocacy organisations that represent people with disabilities.

SWAA is very keen to try to increase the number of people with disabilities who are involved in the Active Participation Register project. This project provides people with disabilities with information on opportunities to get involved in consultations, planning, and decision-making forums in their community. It is a way of trying to make sure that the views of people with disabilities are heard and of giving them opportunities to participate and have more of an influence in the community. We think that the APR project is a really good way of informing and empowering people with disabilities.

If you or someone that you know is interested in learning more about the Active Participation Register project please contact us. An APR brochure and a registration form are enclosed for you to complete if you would like to join the project. It costs people nothing to be listed on the APR, you can opt out at any time if you decide you don't want to be involved, and you will be provided with some very useful information that could lead to some great opportunities to be more involved in your community.

Finally, SWAA's Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday 19 November (all welcome). We currently have a couple of vacancies on the Committee of Management and people with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

Robert Dick.
Co-ordinator

You can help Southwest Advocacy by passing this newsletter on to someone else who might be interested in reading it after you.

WHAT ARE LIONS HEARING DOGS?



Lions Hearing dogs are dogs who have been trained specifically to be their deaf owner's ears. These dogs are identified by the bright orange collar and lead and are trained to react to normal household sounds such as the telephone ringing, smoke alarm; door bell or knock; whistling kettle; a baby crying, and the list goes on.

Hearing dogs have the same access rights to all public places as guide dogs.

For more information—www.hearingdogs.asn.au

CONTRIBUTIONS To SWAA NEWS

We welcome any contributions to the newsletter in the form of letters, stories, articles and news items relevant to disability issues.

Items printed in SWAA News do not necessarily reflect the views of SWAA, staff or Committee of Management

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is a great way to support our work, and we are very keen for people who have used the service to become members. Members receive our quarterly newsletter and other mail outs about disability issues and can have a say in the running of Southwest Advocacy by voting at our Annual General Meetings.

Membership of Southwest Advocacy is free.

If you would like to become a member please contact Southwest Advocacy for a membership form.

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KEEPING ACTIVE HELPS ALLEVIATE DEPRESSION

What do we know?

Keeping active can be a great way of helping to manage depression and anxiety.

How do we know this?

- Research shows that regular physical activity significantly reduces the risk of people developing depression. People who do not take part in physical activity are more likely to have depressive systems compared to people who exercised regularly.
- Regular aerobic and strength-training activities of light or moderate intensity can result in up to a 50% reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety, especially for women and older people.
- In older people, exercise has been found to be just as beneficial as antidepressant medication or social contact in the treatment of depression.*
- The cycle of depression can be broken by participating in pleasurable activities, including keeping fit (riding a bike, jogging, playing football or going for a 20 minute walk).
- The effects of exercise in those under 20 with mild to moderate depression is not as well researched, but the evidence suggest some benefits.**

How can physical exercise help mental health?

Keeping active can help in a number of ways, including:

- lifting mood
- helping people get a good night's sleep
- helping people feel more energetic and less tired
- blocking negative thoughts and/or distracting people from daily worries
- increasing social contact.

Where to get help

While exercise can help manage depression, often when people become depressed, they often have no energy or motivation. As a result, they often become less active. That is why it can be a good idea to enlist some help. Below is a list of professionals and organisations that can help.

General Practitioner

A doctor who is a General Practitioner (GP) will be able to provide advice and information about depression and exercise. He/she will also be able to make a referral to a qualified exercise physiologist.

Exercise Physiologists

Exercise physiologists are health professionals who have graduated from a certified university course in exercise science and provide services relating to health, fitness and exercise. People who have ongoing health conditions are now able to access services from exercise physiologists at reduced rates. Under an Enhance Primary Care (EPC) plan, if a doctor who is a General Practitioner (GP) refers a person, they may be entitled to five visits per calendar year to an exercise physiologist while receiving a rebate through Medicare of \$45.85 per session. For more information go to www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

Sources

* Singh N, Clements K, Singh M. The efficacy of exercise as a long-term antidepressant in elderly subjects: a randomized controlled trial. *J Gerontol* 2001

** *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2006 Issue 3*

Some Useful Tips on How to Avoid Centrelink Debt

If you get a Social Security payment, you have to tell Centrelink if there are any changes in your circumstances.

This is because your payment might change. Centrelink would have told you this when you were given your payment or on a reassessment.

Below are some of the kinds of changes you should tell Centrelink about so that they pay the right amount and you don't end up owing them money:

- ◆ If you close a bank account, open a new one, change your address, get married, your income and things you own goes up or down, and even if your rent goes up or down
- ◆ If you partner dies you must tell Centrelink before 28 days are up
- ◆ You must tell Centrelink about changes within a certain time. This is called the notification period
- ◆ The notification period is different for certain payments. For the DSP, the notification period is within 14 days from the events occurring or likely to happen
- ◆ If the 14 days ends on a weekend or public holiday, the time to notify Centrelink is the next working day
- ◆ If you plan to go outside Australia, you must notify Centrelink 14 days before you go
- ◆ If you are not sure, it is best to notify Centrelink
- ◆ Report by telephone, fax, post or go to the Centrelink Office nearest to you
- ◆ Remember there are ways to avoid Centrelink debts
- ◆ Do not be caught up in unnecessary Centrelink debts

**For help with Centrelink problems
call Welfare Rights Unit**

**Melbourne - (03) 9416 1111 or
Geelong - (03) 5221 4744**

*In our next newsletter we will talk about 'Asking for
A Review of a Centrelink Decision'*



STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS MEANS PEOPLE RELUCTANT TO SEEK TREATMENT

People showing early signs of mental illness can be reluctant to seek medical treatment due to a perceived lack of public sympathy towards these conditions according to new research released today. Alarming, four out of five (80%) Australians believe the general community is not understanding and supportive of people with mental illness.

The research, conducted for SANE Australia and published in this month's Pfizer Australia Health Report, also found that one in three (30%) of those surveyed said they were unsure how a friend or colleague would react to them on hearing that they had a mental illness. They are concerned that sharing this information with others could mean they may be sacked from their job, discriminated against and mocked, or lose important relationships.

One finding shows that three in four people do not know the early signs of mental illness. This lack of awareness, combined with stigma, further reduces the likelihood of a person seeking help early.

Barbara Hocking, Executive Director of SANE Australia, says: 'It is sobering to learn that in 2007 people may not seek help for early symptoms of mental illness for fear of being ridiculed, isolated or losing their job. This demonstrates the great need for community education that mental illness is real and needs real treatment, This stigma is particularly tragic as we know that early intervention for mental illness is crucial to reduce the numbers of people who die by suicide.'

Despite the lack of perceived public sympathy for people with mental illnesses, the research did detect some positive trends. More than four in five Australians (83%) recognise mental illness as a medical condition affecting the way someone acts and feels.

Anyone can help a friend who shows the early signs of mental illness by encouraging them to talk to their GP about their concerns, or offering to go to the doctor with them for support.

Seek a medical assessment as soon as possible if someone is experiencing possible symptoms of mental illness, such as:

- * Feels unusually sad or worried for more than two weeks
- * Thinks they are worthless
- * Feels it would not matter if they died
- * Sleeps poorly or stays awake all night
- * Become afraid or suspicious for no reason
- * Hears voices no one else can hear

For information about the full range of early signs of mental illness, call the SANE Helpline on 1800 18 SANE (7263) or read the Fact sheets on the SANE website at www.sane.org

SANE Australia has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to assist with educating the public about the early signs of mental illness to produce this June's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Free copies can be requested by phoning 1800 675 229 or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

Findings are based on responses from 1,499 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in August 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research. Pfizer Australia is the nation's leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au

Interviews available with Barbara Hocking, Executive Director SANE AUSTRALIA.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Hausmann Communications:

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