

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY WEEK

Statement by Minister for Disability Services

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Disability Services) [9.12 am]: I rise to inform members that this is acquired brain injury week. Acquired brain injury refers to any brain damage that occurs after birth. Some 160 000 Australians are coping with some form of acquired brain injury, with more men affected than women. Brain injury can include sudden onset damage sustained by trauma, infection, lack of oxygen - during near drowning or suicide attempts for example - strokes or drug use episodes. Acquired brain injury can also include insidious onset from prolonged alcohol or substance abuse, tumours or neurological diseases.

The long-term effects of brain injury are difficult to predict and will be different for each person. They range from mild to profound incapacity. It is common for many people with an ABI to experience a slowing down in the speed with which they process information, plan and solve problems. They will often experience changes to their behaviour and personality, and physical and sensory abilities. The consequences of a person having an ABI are ongoing and far reaching. A person with an ABI undergoes great distress coming to terms with any loss of function and progress through the rigours of adaptation and rehabilitation. Family, friends and partners also experience difficulties dealing with emotional and practical burdens, with interruptions to family life and role changes. Caring for someone who has had a brain injury places particular strain on family networks and enormous burdens on the immediate family.

Members are aware of the enormous contribution and personal sacrifice carers make to the community. The national carers rally in Canberra only last week brought this into the spotlight. Carers from across Western Australia travelled to Canberra to ask the Howard government to walk a mile in their shoes. This campaign further highlights the need for the Howard government to recognise and support this country's hidden army of carers. The campaign also reminds the wider community that everyone faces the prospect of caring for a loved one at some time in their lives, and that the community must be made aware of the impact caring can have on individuals and their families. With rehabilitation and individualised support, most people with ABI can expect to improve. However, improvement will be hampered if these people continue to be housed inappropriately.

There are 55 young people in Western Australia living in aged care facilities. Many of them suffer an acquired brain injury. While aged care facilities provide excellent care for aged people, placing young people in these facilities is neither suitable nor fair on the individual or the other residents. People with acquired brain injury are entitled to the support they need to reach their potential and I urge the opposition to join me in the continued fight to ensure that the federal government helps us appropriately house these young people.