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Submission from  
ConnectGroups – Support Groups Association of WA Inc  
To  
The Review of WA's Current and Future Hospital and Community Health Care  
Services”

(With particular reference to Item 2, ‘identifying any outstanding needs and gaps in  
health care services’)

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

ConnectGroups – Support Groups Association WA is the peak body for support groups across the state. We are a not for profit organisation that links members of the community to groups that deal with a wide range of life-affecting issues. This information is accessible free of charge via our Online Directory at [www.connectgroups.org.au](http://www.connectgroups.org.au)., by telephoning the office, or by contacting us via e-mail on [info@connectgroups.org.au](mailto:info@connectgroups.org.au).

In addition to this referral service, one of our most important roles is providing hands-on assistance to new and existing support groups. We do this through offering one-on-one mentoring, training and the provision of resources (also available on our website.). We also run forums for support groups and related organisations. All of these services are free of charge to our members.

Our web-site also contains an e-newsletter and members, related organisations and interested members of the public are encouraged to read and contribute to it.

Support groups play a vital role in the community and fill a vital gap in health care provision, by offering people with health (and mental health) issues an affordable and sustainable way to access information, help and understanding. In the current economic climate, with the rise in the occurrence of mental illness (‘Currently 1 in 5 Australians will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their lives’ [http://www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth/about\\_mental/mh\\_whatiscfm](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth/about_mental/mh_whatiscfm) 2009), and with an ageing population, the need for support groups is likely to increase.

However, to our knowledge there has been limited recognition of the value of support groups by the way of government financial assistance or the provision of resources to support groups and this submission aims to address this shortfall on behalf of the support and self help groups we represent.

## **SUBMISSION DATA COLLECTION**

12 support groups responded to a questionnaire distributed by ConnectGroups in July 2009. These were:

1. The Addisons Disease Association
2. Meniere's Australia Inc. Western Australia (MAWA)
3. The Humanist Society of WA
4. Speak Easy
5. Alcoholics Anonymous Central Service Office
6. Armadale Continence Support Group
7. Silver Chain Continence Clinic
8. angel hands Inc
9. Orthomolecular Support WA Inc (OSWA)
10. Geraldton Stroke Support Group
11. Periodic Paralysis and Myotonia Congenita Support Group
12. Fibromyalgia Support Network

## **FINDINGS**

- On average the groups function on an annual budget of just over \$1,000.00. Generally this income is self generated through member donations, sales of literature and fundraising. Most support groups receive no funding from government agencies or organizations
- These Support groups engage over 1,500 people a year at an average cost of \$0.70 per person
- Support groups fill the gap in health service provision by allowing participants access to free, ongoing, anonymous, social, emotional and practical support.
- Support groups rely on the volunteers for day to day running of the groups (administration and financial), and for a range of other tasks including tea/coffee rosters, library maintenance, mentoring, facilitation, guest speaking, researching, marketing, and educative roles.
- Those support groups that end up having to fold, do so due to a lack of both financial and practical resources.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the current government:

1. Promote, via the Health Department and health professionals the value of support groups to health consumers
2. Acknowledge the value of support groups by providing ongoing government financial assistance to support groups
3. Allow support groups to access unused rooms in public hospitals and child health centres to run their support groups and that this resource be provided free of charge.