

National Pain Strategy bringing pain services to the bush

Lesley Brydon

Painaustralia, NSW

Introduction: Pain is the most common reason people seek medical help, yet it remains one of the most neglected areas of health care, with around 80% of people missing out on effective treatment. One in five Australians including adolescents and children live with chronic pain, rising to one in three people aged over 65.¹

Prevalence is greater in rural areas, due to the physically demanding nature of work and lack of effective, timely care for acute pain conditions which can lead to development of chronic pain.² Chronic pain is commonly associated with forced retirement, relationship breakdown, depression and suicide.³

Policy: The National Pain Strategy (2010) provides a nation-wide framework for the delivery of pain management services with a focus on prevention and multidisciplinary management of acute, chronic and cancer pain. Its recommendations have now been adopted by all state governments and the ACT and investment in new and expanded services is leading to improved health outcomes for consumers. However progress is fragmented and under-funded and Federal Government coordination and leadership is urgently needed.

Progress: Progress in regional areas includes:

- establishment of 14 new regional multidisciplinary pain centres in NSW, QLD and VIC
- community-based services providing pain management education and early intervention in areas in Western Australia, New South Wales, Northern Victoria and Northern Queensland, in partnership with Medicare Locals. It is hoped these will transition to the Primary Health Networks
- outreach services via Telehealth and MSOAP from key centres in all states

¹ Blyth, F, March, L, Brnabic, A, Jorm, L, Williamson, M, Cousins, M (2001), Chronic pain in Australia: a prevalence study. *Pain*. 89(2-3), 127-34

² ABS 2011 4102.0 Australian Social Trends: Health Outside Major Cities, Report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Released 25/3/2011.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Mar+2011>

³ Suicide Prevention Australia's Position Statement on Chronic Illness, Chronic Pain and Suicide Prevention http://suicidepreventionaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/SPA-PositionStatement-_April_2012_Final-V4.pdf

- *Pain Heroes* program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people developed by the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health
- websites providing consumer and health professional resources: WA Health's pain*HEALTH*; NSW Health's ACI Pain Network and Pain Bytes with resources for children supported by Sydney, Westmead and Hunter Children's Hospitals; Arthritis and Osteoporosis WA Bones and Joints School, a website for families, students and teachers
- community support groups, a Pain Hotline and online support forum, all staffed by volunteers
- fact sheets with advice on managing chronic pain are available from GP desk top software, Medical Director and Best Practice.

Workforce challenges: The availability of pain management education and training (online and via webinar) is helping to build much-needed capacity in rural areas. Further efforts are needed to ensure appropriate access to Medicare for allied health services, essential to the effective management of pain.