

Expression of Interest
on
**Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation
(National Injury Insurance Scheme) Amendment
Bill 2016**

To: Research Director

Organisation: Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee

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Submitted by Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors

18 July 2016

Research Director
Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (National Injury Insurance Scheme) Amendment Bill 2016. The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors Inc (ASORC) is the pre-eminent professional body for rehabilitation counsellors. Our members are Allied Health Professionals who work within a counselling and case management framework to assist people who are experiencing disability, a health condition or social disadvantage to participate in employment or education, or to live independently and access services in the community. Rehabilitation Counsellors are specialist counsellors that understand the impact of disability, health conditions and disadvantage on people's lives, and especially the importance that work and education plays in achieving a sense of inclusion, independence, optimism and in enhancing self-esteem.

ASORC acknowledges that scheme participants enter the scheme on the basis that they have sustained serious injuries and therefore face complex challenges re-engaging in their normal social roles, in the community and economy. Schemes that have already made steps to include life time support for eligible participants have opted for voluntary participation in activities surrounding these domains. While this seems to make sense, it is important to acknowledge people who are eligible for entitlements under this category may need some assistance in moving forward from their injury and thinking about the future. We believe that access to these sorts of supports should be made in a timely fashion as there is good evidence that *early intervention* is the key to positive outcomes (http://www.lifetimecare.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/20725/ACI-vocational-participation-report.pdf (further referred to as lifetimecare.nsw.gov.au)). The Investigation of Vocational Programs and Outcomes for people with Traumatic Brain Injury in NSW has highlighted that despite significant injuries, people still highly value work and see this as "vitally important in client's lives, promoting health, shaping their self-identity and signifying achievement of normality" (lifetimecare.nsw.gov.au, p3.). However the challenge is that people who are left to self-refer for services, often don't do so for a variety of reasons eg. low mood, motivation, fear of failure if they participate, etc... Further to the topic of the health benefits of engaging in the workforce, the Consensus Statement on the Health Benefits of Work: Realising the health benefits of work (<https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/realising-the-health-benefits-of-work.pdf>), which has been in circulation since 2011 by the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and Faculty of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, highlights that people who are engaged in the workforce have better health outcomes.

As such, it follows, that work is an incredibly important aspect of peoples' lives, regardless of disability or medical barriers to employment. It is equally important to acknowledge that providing support for people who have serious injuries needs to be targeted and highly personalised and wherever possible driven by the consumer of the support rather than dictated by the systems set up to support the end consumer.



This approach promotes autonomy, which is so often removed when people are referred to statutory schemes, leading to decreased levels of self-efficacy and low self-esteem, to a perpetuating cycle of hopelessness and despair, and a heightened sense of disability.

ASORC's full members meet our core competencies, some of which include:

- Vocational counselling and assessment;
- Vocational training and job placement;
- Independent living and avocational counselling; and
- Placement and life care planning.

These competencies place our members in a strong position to be able to assist people who require life time support, to not only enter employment but to maintain this employment. Assistance for scheme participants to maintain their social roles, community participation and engagement in work needs to be a life time commitment. Without adequate support to maintain their independence, participants are likely to either 'fall out' of employment or other activities, or they may require assistance to increase/decrease their participation, depending on their own personal circumstances, and it's ASORC's view that they should be supported to do this without jeopardising their life time care entitlements. This is a critical aspect of scheme design, because if a person with a serious injury is able for a period to participate fully in the economy, then this should be encouraged, but it is highly likely that this will not be sustainable in the long term and will need to be reasonably-adjusted depending on individual needs.

In summary, ASORC supports the transition to life time care for scheme participants who meet the eligibility criteria. However, we believe critical to its success and, on the basis of learning from the NSW experience, employment and engagement in socially-important roles should remain a focal point for the scheme. Participants should be engaged to use their capacity to fully participate in their social, community and work roles whilst remaining well supported with services, such as rehabilitation counselling and income support, when they need it if they are unable to participate for any period.

ASORC welcomes the opportunity to discuss our submission further and enquires can be directed to admin@asorc.org.au.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael Iacovino

ASORC National President

