



brain injury AUSTRALIA
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WORKING IN THE WEST

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Back to taws: securing meaningful employment for people with an acquired brain injury

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“...peak of peaks”



***ACQUIRED* BRAIN INJURY (ABI)**

**any damage to the
brain that occurs
after birth**

...causes?

- **stroke**
- **alcohol or other drug abuse**
- **brain infection**
- **neurological diseases (Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease etc.)**
- **oxygen loss (asthma, near-drowning etc.)**
- **accident or trauma**



TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)

*results from external force
applied to the head*

- falls
- motor vehicle accidents
- assaults

***over 500,000 Australians have an
acquired brain injury***

**9 out of every 10 said their ABI was caused
by accident or injury (more than half of those
said the accident or injury occurred on a
“street, road or highway”)**

***2 out of every 3 said that
they acquired their brain
injury when they were
aged under 25 years***

***3 out of every
4
were men***

PHYSICAL DISABILITY

- **paralysis**
- **poor balance and coordination**
- **chronic pain**
- **fatigue**
- **seizures (1 in 6)**
- **loss of sense of taste or smell**
- **vision and hearing disturbance**
- **speech impairment**



COGNITIVE DISABILITY

**poor memory and concentration
(2 in every 3)**

= reduced ability

- to learn**
- to plan and**
- to solve problems**



“...one memorable day I started the taps running, turned around, got distracted (the mailman came) and *then spent quite a while mopping up* because I had forgotten what I was doing.”



“...new relationships are problematic. I have changed my query from ‘Do I know you?’ to ‘*Do you know me?*’ (I think I’ve really upset some people when I used the former question.)”



“CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR”

for 2 out of 3, the *most* disabling

- increased irritability
- poor impulse control
- verbal and physical aggression
- *disinhibition*

...prime of life...

**TBI; 10 times as common as spinal injury
Produces, on average, 3 times the level of disability**

3 in 4 make a good *physical* recovery

the “invisible” disability

**effects: ABI or the “person”?
short-term memory = inattention, low intelligence?
fatigue = laziness?
irritability = “personality”?**



- $\leq 90\%$ return to care of family;
- average costs of care for severe TBI - over \$100,000 per year;
- “TBIs” “*most likely* to need help with activities related to learning and working” $> 75\%$ needed assistance;
- “*less likely* (= 2,680) than service users generally to access disability employment services”;
- 60% likelihood of major mental illness during lifetime;
- changes in sexual function – reduced libido, impotence etc.;
- 50% of all marriages involving a partner with a TBI dissolved < 6 years of injury...



“...behind the eight ball”

- low income, low levels of education, poor housing, histories of abuse and neglect, parental alcohol and other drug abuse, marital breakdown

- *the “story”?*
- *whose “fault”?*

RETURN-TO-WORK

- who’s asking?
- TBIs; 2 in 5 show limited insight into the nature, extent and range of the impairments



secondly,

“...presents
well.”



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“Client A sustained an extremely severe TBI in a motor vehicle accident, and underwent an inpatient rehabilitation program. She was discharged at 8 months post-injury.

She attended Centrelink to apply for a DSP *with supporting information from the brain injury rehabilitation unit.* When asked by the Centrelink officer if she would like to work, she replied ‘yes’ and similarly when asked if she felt able to work, she replied ‘yes’. On those grounds, her application for the Pension was refused and she was placed on a Newstart Allowance...



...The client had extensive cognitive, visual and physical impairments, with very little carry-over of memory from one day to the next. This included impairments in insight. Commencing work or attending an employment agency was unsuitable at that stage of her recovery.

The brain injury rehabilitation unit assessment (available to Centrelink from the client) suggested that she needed another 12 months...and that would be the opportune time to examine her suitability for a vocational rehabilitation program.”



good *physical* recovery (long-term physical disability = 1/4)?

highly motivated to work/ previous employment?

underestimates mental and physical fatigue?

excessively talkative (“verbosity”)

overestimates abilities? overstates ambitions? (“grandiosity”)

exaggerates accomplishments? (“confabulation”)

difficulty answering questions directly? repeating, returning to same topics (“perseveration”)

overly familiar? “inappropriate”? easily irritated? (“disinhibition”)

lacking in initiative, in motivation, in drive? (“adynamia”)

dramatic, rapid changes in emotion? (“lability”)



really,

- second lowest representation (of all people with a disability)
- highest mean number of hours to “get job”
- third highest mean direct support per client (58 hours) after people with autism and intellectual disability
- mean level of client support required had fallen for all disability groups *except for people with an ABI...*



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