



Guest editorial

Nick Rushworth, Executive Officer, Brain Injury Australia

Falls-Related Traumatic Brain Injury: a major issue now and into the future

I've just finished writing a policy paper for the Australian Government on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) - a disability that results from external force applied to the head - due to falls. You might think it's a minor issue. But just as falls are now the leading cause of injuries that end up in Australia's hospitals, they are also the leading cause of TBI. And it's not because more children are being bounced from trampolines or more drunken teenagers are falling from balconies on the weekend. It's because older people are "slipping", "tripping" or "stumbling" over (the labels our hospitals give to the kinds of falls involved). It's the elephant in our room - Australia's ageing population; its fastest growing segment is those aged 85 years and over. This is the group with the highest falls injury, falls death, TBI and TBI death rates. Consultants hired by the Australian Government predict that by 2051 the health care costs of falls in the elderly will triple to \$1.3 billion per annum, requiring almost 900,000 additional hospital bed days and over 3,000 extra residential aged care places. It's next to impossible to imagine our hospital system being prepared for - or any government being able to pay for - that. Other consultants predict that, while the demand for carers for the aged will rise by 160 per cent by 2031, their supply will fall short. By some 600,000.

A cynic might say that government has been very successful at privatising care - that carers save it around \$30.5 billion per year. The same cynic might say the new value government places on carers is the softening up it needs to achieve before placing yet more demands on them. I don't think that governments, who never like looking beyond the horizon of the next election, think that far ahead. Because if they did, they'd be terrified by

the prospect. Australia faces a perfect storm of an ageing population combined with increasing life expectancy and decreasing death rates - from stroke and falls-related TBI, for example. At the same time, 5.4 million baby boomers are marching towards retirement and beyond, armed with deep pockets - they represent some of the wealthiest households in Australia - and higher expectations than their parents of the kind of care they'll receive. Some of them will be able to buy their way out of the shock they'll experience when they find out their kind of care isn't available in the public system. But it's next to impossible to imagine that quality aged care will always - and everywhere - be made available to those reliant on government income support. Without legions of unpaid carers. Our boomers had far fewer kids (to care for them in their old age) than their parents did. And what boomer kids there are may be less able - or less willing - to turn their lives over to caring for their parents.

Nick Rushworth is Executive Officer of Brain Injury Australia - the national peak Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) advocacy organisation representing, through its State and Territory member organisations, the needs of people with an ABI, their families and carers. In 1996, armed with a bicycle, Nick attacked two cars. The cars won, but Nick's recovery from a very severe ABI was exceptional. Formerly a producer with ABC Radio National and the Nine Television Network's *Sunday* program, his most recent work has been for the Northern Territory Government setting up their new "Office of Disability".

Copies of Brain Injury Australia's policy paper on falls-related Traumatic Brain Injury are available at its website: www.braininjuryaustralia.org.au

Contents

Guest editorial	page 1	Reading corner	page 7	Multicultural carers	page 13
Carers NSW update	page 2	President's editorial	pages 8-9	Talk to others	page 14
News	pages 3-4	Inform yourself	page 10	Noticeboard	page 15
Carer's story	page 5	Money matters	page 11	Help support us	page 16
Look after yourself	page 6	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers	page 12		