

**TASKFORCESUBMISSION:** submission

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**POSITION:** Executive Manager

**ORGANISATION:** arbias Ltd

**SUBMISSION1:** arbias, the only specialist service in Australia dedicated to providing support services for people with alcohol and substance related brain injury supports and congratulates the Rudd government on the establishment of the preventative Health Taskforce.

It is pleasing that this government has identified the need to tackle the issue of alcohol related harm; however arbias is concerned about the lack of detail paid to Alcohol Related Brain Injury (ARBI). ARBI is often termed the "hidden disability" and this is the case with both papers - ARBI remains hidden apart from some brief mentions of Wernicke Korsakoff's Syndrome (WKS) and the potential damage alcohol can cause to the developing brain.

The early stages of ARBI often go undiagnosed and undetected due to the fact that well learned skills such as verbal and language functioning remains intact. People often present superficially masking their cognitive impairment. It is these people who pose a challenge to health professionals, the health system, families, employers and the community. Frontal Lobe Dysfunction (FLD) is one of the early indicators of ARBI while memory function is intact. FLD results in changes in thinking patterns, behaviour and personality, making it difficult for people to plan, organise to monitor and control behaviour, to think flexibly and to adapt to change or unfamiliar situations. (arbias, 2007). It is particularly important to note that an individual with FLD loses the ability to appreciate consequences which play out in the justice and correctional systems.

There is no accurate data relating to levels of ARBI in Australia because many people do not realize they have caused the damage. For males to be putting themselves at risk they need to consume 6 standard drinks per day for 8-10 years, with females needing to consume 3 standard drinks per day for the same time period. If the government is serious about Australia becoming the healthiest country by 2020 more then needs to be done to address the issue of ARBI. According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (AIHW, 2008) 10.3% of respondents consumed alcohol in a way considered risky or a high risk to health in the long term. It is these people who are putting themselves of potential risk of ARBI. It is a concern that the perception associated with ARBI is the homeless person on the park bench with their alcohol in a brown paper bag, when in reality the well educated often well nourished person who holds down a job for the moment, and when at home drinks a bottle of wine over dinner each night is also at risk. ARBI does not discriminate age, race, gender or religion.

There is a lack of dedicated services nation wide with respect to education and diagnosis; often early diagnosis has a direct correlation with minimization of damage. arbias research indicates the cost in human terms and financially to the community is as serious as many other major health issues within the Australian population.

Health professionals, drug and alcohol workers and welfare staff need to be educated about how to detect the early signs and symptoms of ARBI to avoid the disability progressing to the more severe forms such as WKS. arbias is requesting that the taskforce focus attention to ARBI as part of its Australia the Healthiest country by 2020 paper. ARBI is totally preventable and through appropriate prevention and diagnosis strategies, people who suffer from ARBI can be a less of a burden on the already overwhelmed health and welfare sector.

References:

Arbias, 2007. Looking Forward - General Information book on alcohol related brain impairment. Arbias Ltd.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: first results. Drug Statistics Series number 20.Cat. no. PHE 98. Canberra: AIHW.

**PRIVACY:** yes

**SUBMIT:** Submit