

MEDIA RELEASE

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Kids in pain a heavy burden on carers and families: more help needed

Painaustralia is calling for more paediatric pain services and better support for young people with pain and their families this Carers Week, to relieve the enormous pressures faced by parents. The prevalence of chronic pain in kids and teens is as much as adults – affecting one in five – yet there are only six paediatric pain services operating and 12 paediatric pain specialists across Australia.

Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett says more needs to be done to adequately address paediatric pain care and support young families: **“Young people with pain require specialised care. We need health professionals who understand childhood development and how to tailor treatment approaches to children, as well as specialists who are well versed in childhood pain and best-practice approaches. We have to reduce unnecessary suffering and provide greater support to caregivers and families. It is not acceptable to have parents waiting months or having to take their children interstate to access pain services, placing even more pressure on finances and livelihoods.”**

Unmanaged or poorly managed pain in young people can result in dropping out of school, failing to reach academic potential or missing job opportunities. Young people in pain can become dependent on welfare, unemployed and isolated. Parents miss work and siblings often miss out on care because of the need to look after a child in pain.

Scott Milne is a carer for his two young sons, Ronan (aged 9) and Marc (aged 10). They both have conditions that cause ongoing pain and require specialised medical treatment and support. A former social worker, Scott says carers need more support: **“Caring for the boys is a huge burden financially and emotionally. I’ve had to retire early to care for them full-time. My wife works but we struggle to pay the bills, we have medical appointments every week. Our only holidays are trips to Sydney to see specialists, because there are limited services and a lack of expertise locally. But the whole time away is a drain because we’re trying to keep the kids comfortable and pain-free. There is really no support for carers of kids with pain.”**

Ms Bennett says it is time to get serious about implementing a national pain strategy: **“This issue requires leadership from the Australian Government. Over 150 groups helped develop a national pain strategy in 2011, but it needs to be updated and implemented nationally. Access to pain management services and support has to improve. It’s one practical way we can help parents caring for kids with pain.”**

Painaustralia recommends a strategy that includes:

- updating and implementing the 2011 National Pain Strategy;
- ensuring the health workforce is skilled in best-practice assessment and treatment of pain;
- better access to public pain services, particularly paediatric services;
- education for consumers about best-practice care and self-management of pain; and
- an overhaul of our Medicare and private health insurance systems to ensure access to best practice care is not prohibitively expensive.

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