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Stroke survivors demand support

Stroke survivors say that they struggle to get their lives back on track after a stroke because of the lack of stroke specific support and are asking for more formal support networks to be set up.

Stroke survivors say that peer support groups form a vital part of their recovery after a stroke, yet only a tiny percentage of stroke survivors access these support groups.

The groups offer support, understanding, friendship, social activities and education. They provide stroke survivors and their carers an avenue to help deal with the often devastating impact of stroke.

Of the estimated 346,700 Australians trying to get on with life after stroke, only 4,000 stroke survivors and carers were getting to stroke support groups, according to a survey conducted by the National Stroke Foundation and State Stroke Associations.

That's only 0.01 percent of stroke survivors in Australia.

Sally Hoffmann from the National Stroke Foundation commented: "Last year, the Federal Government committed more than \$1 million to cancer support groups. Yet, there hasn't been any federal money committed for stroke support groups. It doesn't make sense."

Ms Hoffmann said that most stroke survivors go home to live in the community and many lived with permanent disability.

"These figures clearly show a big gap between the number of people living at home with stroke and those getting to stroke support groups. This gap will continue to grow unless action is taken now," Ms Hoffmann said.

Over 53,000 strokes will occur this year – that's one every 10 minutes. The number of stroke survivors in Australia has tripled over the last 10 years and over the next 10, nearly 500,000 Australians will suffer at least one stroke.

Stroke survivors and their families told the National Stroke Foundation that they receive little or no information from the health system about life after stroke.

"Many stroke survivors describe returning home after stroke as a black hole. Many face isolation and report that there's not enough stroke support in the community. This has a big impact on how well someone recovers after a stroke," Ms Hoffmann said.

"Stroke survivors really are the forgotten population."

"Stroke survivors report the absolute importance of peer support during the recovery process. However, this is just one strategy that may help stroke survivors, we still need to explore the most effective ways of supporting stroke survivors and their carers in the recovery process," Ms Hoffmann said.

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