



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**Verity Firth**

**Minister for Women  
Minister for Science and Medical Research  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water**

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Monday, 12 November 2007

**SPINAL CORD INJURY AWARENESS WEEK 2007**

### **A TIME TO HONOUR THE THOUSANDS LIVING WITH SPINAL CORD INJURY**

At the start of *Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Week 2007* (12 – 18 November) the NSW community is being urged to better inform themselves about this most debilitating and as yet incurable affliction as well as encouraged to open their wallets in support of the research giving hope to sufferers.

Minister for Science and Medical Research Verity Firth said spinal cord injury resulting in partial or complete paralysis affects at least 100,000 NSW residents, with around half of them acquiring their condition when aged between just 15 and 34.

“The real tragedy of spinal cord injury is that it overwhelmingly affects young, active people, usually the result of a car accident, a fall or an incident on the sporting field,” said Ms Firth.

“But no matter how it happens, a spinal cord injury is always sudden and unexpected, with devastating lifelong consequences.

“This week is also an opportunity to acknowledge the sacrifices and unwavering love of the many families caring for sufferers.

“These families deserve nothing less than our collective gratitude.

“And those of us wanting to register our support for sufferers and their families should consider donating to spinal cord research.”

One way to do so is to go to the Spinal Injuries Association: [www.spinal.com.au](http://www.spinal.com.au).

In addition to the enormous personal and family costs associated with spinal cord injury and related neurological conditions, is the economic price paid by entire community.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that a person with a spinal cord injury requires personal and domestic care, occupational therapy and equipment costing more than \$660,000 per year.

“In response to these enormous personal and social costs, the NSW Government is investing significant amounts of money in not only the best possible care for sufferers, but in the research dedicated to finding better therapies and ultimately a cure,” said Ms Firth.

The NSW Government’s quest for a cure received a significant boost in 2003 when Sydney hosted the Making Connections conference and a visit from the late Christopher Reeve.

“Out of these landmark events came our \$10.9 million Spinal Cord Injury and Related Neurological Conditions Fund for the promotion of biomedical research into the condition – an Australian-first,” said Ms Firth.

“Four years later, there have been real advances in research involving new ways to improve movement and physical function as well as therapies that prevent muscle wasting.”

In this year’s State Budget, the NSW Government allocated a further \$11.2 million to continuing the promising lab work for at least another four years, with \$1 million already allocated to stem cell research and the establishment of a dedicated brain bank for multiple sclerosis research.

“NSW has also been instrumental in establishing the Australian New Zealand Spinal Cord Injury Network comprising senior spinal and neurological researchers from both sides of the Tasman,” said Ms Firth.

The Network was formally launched at the start of November this year with a clear mission to advance research into the rehabilitation and repair of spinal cord injury and other neurological conditions through cross-Tasman, and hopefully, international collaborations.

“I am in the process of writing to my state and territory colleagues encouraging their respective governments to support the Network,” said Ms Firth.

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