



MEDIA STATEMENT

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

Thursday, 1 November 2007

NSW ACCELERATES SPINAL RESEARCH EFFORT

STATE PLAN TARGET S2: Improve survival rates and quality of life for people with potentially fatal or chronic illness through improvements in health care.

STATE PLAN TARGET F2: Increase community participation for people with disabilities

STATE PLAN TARGET P1: Continue to increase business through making NSW a more attractive place to do business

The NSW Government has set aside \$600,000 to facilitate greater national and international collaboration amongst those leading scientists and clinicians pursuing cures to spinal cord injury and other neurological conditions.

Minister for Science and Medical Research Verity Firth tonight attended the *Annual Scientific Meeting of Australian and New Zealand Spinal Cord Society* to officially launch the Australia and New Zealand Spinal Cord Injury Network (ANZSCIN) with a pledge of \$600,000 to support its work over the next three years.

Ms Firth said NSW is already home to some of the world's leading spinal and neurological researchers and rehabilitation professionals.

"The new Network is about consolidating and better coordinating our already substantial research efforts and linking it nationally, as well as providing a forum in which expertise and future breakthroughs can be quickly shared amongst researchers, clinicians and advocates," said Ms Firth.

"Its mission is clear: to advance research into the rehabilitation and repair of spinal cord injury and other neurological conditions.

"The NSW Government is proud to have supported the development of ANZSCIN and has been working closely with a Steering Committee of researchers and clinicians from across Australia and New Zealand to make it a reality.

"Ultimately, our investment is about finding cures to these most debilitating of afflictions."

Ms Firth is now encouraging the Commonwealth as well as other state and territory governments to come on board.

"While NSW is doing its bit to help nationalise and ultimately globalise the spinal research effort, more work needs to be done. Accordingly, I urge my Commonwealth and State colleagues to get behind this initiative," said Ms Firth.

Funding for the Network will come from the NSW Government's Spinal Cord Injury and Related Neurological Conditions Fund – an Australian-first established in 2003 following the visit to Sydney by the late Christopher Reeve.

“Three and a half years later, there have been significant advances in research involving new ways to improve movement and physical function as well as therapies that prevent muscle wasting,” said Ms Firth.

In this year's State Budget, the NSW Government announced a further \$11.2 million over the next four years to continue the promising research, with \$1 million already allocated to stem cell research and the establishment of a dedicated brain bank for multiple sclerosis research.

The significant investment being made by the NSW Government in this field of research has been prompted by the enormous personal and social costs associated with spinal cord injury and related neurological conditions.

Spinal cord injury resulting in partial or complete paralysis currently affects at least 300,000 Australians, with around half of them injured when aged between 15 and 34.

“The real tragedy of spinal cord injury is that it overwhelmingly affects young, active people, usually the result of motor vehicle accidents, falls or sporting activities,” said Ms Firth.

“But irrespective of how and when it happens, it's always sudden and unexpected, with devastating lifelong consequences.

“In addition to the enormous personal and family costs associated with spinal cord injury and related neurological conditions, there's also an economic price paid by the 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.

Over the next four years, the NSW Government will be investing \$280 million into science and medical research.

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