

Media Release

Embargoed for release on International Epilepsy Day, Monday 10 February 2020

In 2019-20, there will be an estimated 142,740 people living with active epilepsy in Australia, costing a total of \$12.3 billion for the year. The lifetime costs for the estimated 14,603 new cases per year is \$22.2 billion.

New report published by Epilepsy Australia highlights the economic burden of epilepsy

Epilepsy Australia today released *The economic burden of epilepsy in Australia, 2019-2020*, by Deloitte Access Economics that estimates the cost of epilepsy in Australia for the 142,740 people currently living with active epilepsy is \$12.3 billion.

Epilepsy Australia is the peak national body that represents the epilepsy service provider organisations in each state.

The cost includes the burden on the health system, lost productivity in the workforce, costs associated with the provision of informal care, equipment costs, transportation costs and losses associated with reduced income and increased reliance on government welfare payments.

It is also estimated that the lifetime costs for the estimated 14,603 new cases of epilepsy per year is \$22.2 billion.

Wendy Groot, President of Epilepsy Australia said, "Epilepsy is a serious neurological condition that carries with it stigma, psychiatric comorbidities and high economic costs. Epilepsy does not discriminate, being prevalent across age, gender and location."

In Australia, there is approximately a 10 percent population prevalence of individuals who have experienced one seizure during their lifetime. As per the International League Against Epilepsy's (ILAE) definition, an individual is considered to have epilepsy when they experience more than two seizures more than 24 hours apart. Therefore, approximately 3-4 percent of the Australian population will develop the condition at some stage in their lives.

By far, the largest financial cost component found in the report, which was prepared by Deloitte Access Economics, is productivity costs, which account for \$2.3 billion of the total, stemming from reduced workforce participation, absenteeism and a disruption of individuals' productivity. However, the cost of the non-financial loss of wellbeing associated with epilepsy is estimated to cost Australia \$8.2 billion.

The causes of epilepsy are complex and vary depending upon the age at which the first seizure is experienced. Known risk factors include serious head injuries sustained during motor vehicle accidents, trauma or serious falls, strokes or brain haemorrhages, prolonged oxygen deprivation, brain infections and abnormalities, tumours, degenerative conditions such as dementia, and genetic factors. However, in half of all cases, the cause cannot be determined and the individual may never understand why they suffer from the condition.

For those who live with epilepsy, the condition can be debilitating and have serious adverse effects on their personal life, ability to maintain employment, and quality of sleep. It may also pose serious danger to the individual themselves, due to the unpredictable nature of seizure events.

Epilepsy is also associated with a number of comorbidities which can worsen the burden on people living with the condition, and those who provide care to them. In particular, epilepsy has been found to increase the likelihood of an individual experiencing depression and anxiety, fractures, motor vehicle accidents, cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, neurodevelopmental disorders, and migraine.

Ms Groot said, “Epilepsy does not discriminate by age or gender and its effects can range from mild and manageable with appropriate medication, through to unmanageable and severely impactful on an individual’s quality of life.”

“At its worst, severe epilepsy in children can have a negative, lasting and significant effect on their ability to attain an education and work productively throughout their adult lives.”

“This report has defined the extent of the burden of epilepsy on the economy and the need for interventions at each life stage to mitigate the impact of this condition, both on the individual with epilepsy, at whatever age they may be diagnosed, and their families and carers.”

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About Epilepsy Australia

Epilepsy Australia is the national coalition of Australian-wide epilepsy organisations working together to keep our communities informed on the latest medical breakthroughs, social research, publications, news and policy about epilepsy. Our vision is for inclusive communities where people with epilepsy can live and participate free of stigma and discrimination. See list of state-based organisations and contacts below.

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