

New research reveals hidden truths about epilepsy in Tasmania.

The Minister for Health, The Honourable Michael Ferguson MP will today unveil new epilepsy research at Parliament House.

Commissioned by Epilepsy Tasmania, **this report is the first of its kind** to shine a spotlight on the disorder of epilepsy within the Tasmanian population.

This new research confirms the findings of the World Health Organisation that the stigma associated with epilepsy is often more of a problem than the condition itself.

Chief Executive Officer of Epilepsy Tasmania, Ms Wendy Groot explained “Here in Tasmania epilepsy remains widely misunderstood, and **53% of Tasmanians living with epilepsy have experienced discrimination**, and of those **51% in the last 12 months**. The most common place for discrimination is the workplace, followed closely by educational environments,” said Ms Groot.

Only one third of Tasmanians with epilepsy drive their own car. The remainder are forced to rely on public transport or taxis, the cost of which is often prohibitive given **55% are on low incomes and half of these are below the poverty line**, due in part to increased medical expenses and the inability of many to work full-time.

“Interestingly **we are now seeing an increasing number of older people being diagnosed with epilepsy**,” said Ms Groot. Epilepsy Tasmania would like to see further research into the cause/s of this shift given Tasmania’s large ageing population.

Epilepsy has also been discovered to be up to eight times more common in people with other health conditions such as depression, dementia, heart disease and arthritis, further affecting seizure outcome and quality of life.

A direct result of this report will be a new focus by Epilepsy Tasmania on raising awareness of the risk of epilepsy among older Tasmanians, and of epilepsy as a co-morbidity to other health conditions.

“The findings of this report will enable the needs of the 20,000 Tasmanians who will develop epilepsy during their life and the 80,000 people affected in some way such as family, carers, employers and friends to be better met,” said Ms Groot.

-ENDS-

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INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES:

- Epilepsy Tasmania's Chief Executive Officer - Ms Wendy Groot.
- Minister for Health - The Honourable Michael Ferguson MP.

ABOUT EPILEPSY:

Epilepsy is a very common and serious condition that affects nerve cell activity in the brain and results in unpredictable, recurring episodes known as seizures.

A seizure is a disturbance of movement, feeling or consciousness and involves sudden, inappropriate and excessive electrical discharges in the brain. Seizures manifest differently for different people.

Epilepsy can develop at any age regardless of ethnicity or gender. One in 10 people will experience a seizure, and one in 25 Australians (20,000 Tasmanians) will develop epilepsy at some point during their life.

ABOUT EPILEPSY TASMANIA:

Epilepsy Tasmania is a not-for-profit association improving the quality of life and community participation of Tasmanians living with or affected by epilepsy.