

THE AUSTRALIAN SIBLING ADVOCACY NETWORK

Background

Siblings of people with a disability or chronic illness contribute much to the wellbeing of their brothers and sisters. However, they also face a number of challenges which can increase their risk of longer term mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, leading to both personal cost and significant cost to governments and the general community.

Since 1999 Siblings Australia has been providing support, education and training to families and to providers. The Director has run hundreds of workshops around Australia and overseas. Also, the organisation has been involved in research efforts to investigate the needs of siblings and to develop best practice approaches to sibling support. It has long argued the need for a fully funded national initiative to act as a clearinghouse of information/research related to sibling support and to support further collaboration and co-ordination in the sector.

Empirical and anecdotal evidence confirms the national effort to support siblings is uncoordinated, under-funded, fragmented and often duplicated. In short, current investment of funding and community time is not producing effective outcomes. The 2009 [Scoping Project](#), carried out by Siblings Australia, provides an overview of many of the current approaches to sibling support and where there are gaps.

One of the key recommendations of Siblings Australia's national conference, *Creating Connections* 19-20 November, 2009, was that 'the Australian government acknowledge the important needs and contribution of siblings of people with a disability or serious physical or mental illness by:

- *providing secure resources for a national siblings body with responsibility for advocacy, advising government, disseminating information and facilitating collaboration, training, research and evaluation practices'.*

The full *Creating Connections* conference resolution can be found [here](#). To this point, in spite of much activity by Siblings Australia, support for this initiative has not become available.

Leading up to the 2010 election, Families Australia, along with Siblings Australia, developed a [National Action Plan](#) which included the need for a national initiative focussed on siblings. Since then, a number of peak organisations have highlighted the needs of siblings. For example, in late 2011, the RANZCP issued a Position Statement and Issues Paper, on the support of siblings of children and young people with a chronic condition. Many organisations around Australia endorsed this work. Subsequently Families Australia developed a response to the RANZCP work. Other agencies have also highlighted the needs of siblings. These documents can be found on the Siblings Australia [website](#).

In addition, Siblings Australia has provided a number of [submissions](#) to government enquiries.

An advocacy network

In order to further the cause of sibling support, Siblings Australia has decided to establish a national network of individuals and organisations – both government and non-government – which engage with siblings, either at a service, research or policy level, to be called the Australian Sibling Advocacy Network. You can subscribe to the email mailing list for the Network [here](#). The role of the Network will be fine-tuned over the coming months. If you would like further information please email kate@siblingsaustralia.org.au