



CONCUSSION AUSTRALIA

Pre-Budget Submission: Funding For Concussion Education

15 March 2024

Addressee: Department of Treasury

Dear Treasury,

Concussion Australia is a charity that educates grassroots' communities about concussion. Our people include medical experts, lawyers, health professionals, as well as those who remain affected by concussion. We provide (among other things) concussion education workshops and presentations to the public, which extends to legal education about concussion and the law, and also offer monthly online support groups for people and their families struggling with concussion.

The content that we teach and disseminate in the community is designed and approved by the Concussion Australia Medical Advisory Committee ("MAC"). The MAC and its members are independent and conflict of interest free and has some of Australia's leading experts on concussion (see "**Annexure A**").

Australia is in a dire position with respect to concussion as a whole (in sport, schools, domestic violence and otherwise) – we are decades behind where we otherwise should be. Concussion Australia has expertise in every area that concussion touches (legal, medical, personal) though passion lies with educating the community about concussion and its management.

Concussion Education

In 2012, Brain Injury Australia provided a report to the Commonwealth recommending funding be allocated for a cross sport education campaign. No action came from that, and the closest the Commonwealth came to dealing with that recommendation was through the ASC Concussion in Sport Position Statement (which first launched in 2016). Years of inaction then resulted in the 2023 Senate Inquiry into concussion and repeated head trauma in contact sport, which provided several recommendations, all of which are yet to be acted upon.

Without doubt there is a significant history of inaction by all parts of society including government, medical professionals, lawyers, politicians and sporting regulators.¹ This budget provides the Commonwealth with the chance to begin to rectify the mistakes of the past.

To date, there is only one government in Australia who has provided any money for concussion education: the SA Government, and we congratulate them for that – they have provided \$300,000.00 for 18 concussion workshops to be delivered by volunteers across South Australia over the next three years. While that cost appears very high at \$16,000.00 per workshop, we are far happier that they have allocated money at all.

The cost of concussion education and support

As we understand, the Concussion and CTE Coalition (we were originally involved in the initial meetings but owing to Concussion Australia's orthodox position on CTE, Dementia Australia did not invite us to reattend the next meeting) has requested \$16,800,000.00 for a national education program involving: Stage 1: Consultation and strategy development - \$300,000, one off cost; and Stage 2: Program design, development and implementation - \$16,500,000.

With respect to those organisations and their submission, Concussion Australia has already completed consultation and program development over the previous two years – accordingly, if our proposal is accepted, the taxpayer would appear to be millions of dollars better off by going with our below proposal.

¹ For e.g. the RACGP remains without any education for its members with respect to concussion diagnosis and management, which is despite extensive efforts from us to engage them on this topic.

We have consulted across Australia including with political leaders, governments, clubs, schools, unions, lawyers, law firms, sporting bodies, doctors and otherwise. We have tried incredibly hard to consult with sporting bodies, but many have no interest in speaking to us or in properly dealing with this issue at the grassroots – it may also be that they simply do not have the capacity to deal with this issue.

In any event, Concussion Australia proposes a national concussion education program which would include having a State Manager in each state/area tasked with (among other things) stakeholder communication (schools, sporting clubs, State and Federal Government, etc), community member support after a concussion, conduct of educational workshops at schools and clubs, and data collection with respect to concussion. It may even involve investigating alleged breaches of concussion policies. Much of that is broader than simple education because the depth of the issues requires a multi-pronged approach.

We have the following educational content (as designed and approved by the MAC) that is ready to roll out nationally upon receipt of funding from the Commonwealth and or another investor:

1. Educational content for grassroots sporting clubs, schools and teachers;
2. Educational content for lawyers to learn about concussion;
3. Educational content for medical practitioners to learn about diagnosing and managing concussion.

Our workshops are comprehensive, engaging and data received from all participants so far suggests that every single person has significantly improved their understanding of concussion. Since January 2023, we have run 8 (with many more scheduled) workshops across Australia including at schools, for sporting clubs and lawyers.

We have run monthly online support groups that have supported many people from every capital city (and many regional cities). We have completed countless media interviews on the biggest programs and assisted many Australians in a private capacity who have reached out to us for help with their concussions – many have been referred to experts and now have proper medical care. We continue to meet with governments all over Australia and have met with countless ministers, shadow ministers and departmental staff. All of this has occurred without a drop of money – imagine what we could do with money.

Concussion Australia is able to venture into the online education realm if required, but in our view that (to a degree) downplays the seriousness of concussion and there is a lot of material online already – we come in as independent, expert and objective educators. In our view, concussion education needs to be considered on par with a first aid qualification for certain parts of the community (such as teachers, doctors, coaches and athletes in at risk sports) – and that needs to be completed face to face. Otherwise, the Government runs the likely risk that the short online course is simply a “tick and flick” solution, and indeed, one governing body did request a “tick and flick” solution from us). This would also allow Concussion Australia to continue to collect anonymised and important data (which Australia is significantly lacking) from participants about prior concussions, which is what we currently do at our concussion education workshops.²

Given our experience with sporting regulators (including some who actively attempt or have stopped us from educating the community), if Governments are to invest in concussion education for sporting clubs, then we suspect that government would need to take a “bigger stick” approach to sporting regulators such as placing government conditions on funding for that particular sport. If funding was to be granted to Concussion Australia, we would seek to formally partner with the Commonwealth – we have said the same to the Minister for Sport and to the media on several occasions, including on ABC Radio National, Radio Brisbane and otherwise.

Any national program we run would involve concussion education fact sheets, advertising, equipment (such as vehicles), employees and otherwise. Given this, at the low end we expect that **\$500,000.00 p.a. would be a floor** (with a bare bones staff and budget) while a much more comprehensive approach (with State managers and other staff) would see a funding allocation at or around **\$1.5m p.a.** Should you have any further questions or queries then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Brendan Swan
Chief Executive Officer | Chair of the Board of Directors | Solicitor

² For example, every workshop survey collects anonymous data about the number of concussions someone thinks they have had, whether they saw a doctor, and other educational questions. In one high school (teachers), out of 36 survey responses we had a total of 52 concussions in the group, and only 9 of those concussions were seen to by a doctor. Other workshops have seen similar (or worse) data.

ANNEXURE A: Medical Advisory Committee

- Dr Robert Reid AM: Dr Reid is both a director and a member of the Concussion Australia Medical Advisory Committee. Dr Reid's expertise in concussion dates back to 1992, where he was an author of the first report by the NHRMC into head and Neck Injuries in Football and Boxing. He has undertaken lectures for Sports Medicine Australia on concussion, treats many patients with concussion and related injuries and is widely acknowledged as an expert in concussion. Prior to joining our team, he was the Chief Medical Officer of Ice Hockey Australia, and has been the Chief Medical Officer of various football clubs.
- Professor Karen Barlow: Professor Barlow is a neurologist and academic specialising in youth concussion. She is the Chair of Paediatric Rehabilitation at the University of Queensland and was previously the Director of Concussion Research at Alberta Children's Hospital. The bulk of Professor Barlow's research focuses on concussion in children, including the use of Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation.
- Dr Tim Butson: Dr Butson is a TBI Rehabilitation Physician (and owner) at [Beach Brain](#) and runs the Sunshine Coast University Hospital Complex Concussion Clinic. Dr Butson holds an MBBS, Diploma of Sports and Exercise Medicine (Otago), and a Masters of Sports Medicine (UniMelb). Dr Butson's life is dedicated to assisting people with brain injury (including concussion) to achieve their best outcome.
- Paul Michael: Paul is a director of Concussion Australia and the Chair of the Medical Advisory Committee. Paul treats and rehabilitates patients with concussion daily, utilising methods such as eye tracking technology, vision denied VNG as well as digital force plates for balance assessments. He has completed hundreds of hours of courses on the brain, is writing a book on PPCS, and in 2020 published a wide-ranging literature review on concussion. Outside of his voluntary work with CA, Paul runs Brain Balanz, a physiotherapy clinic that solely focuses on brain injury and concussion.