

Community Concussion Research Foundation

Media Release:

Report to Parliament by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee into Concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sports (on 5/9/2023).

The Community Concussion Research Foundation (CCRF) welcomes the report to Parliament on by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee into Concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sports. The Senate Committee received 92 submissions and heard from 84 witnesses.

Committee Chair, Senator Janet Rice, in summarising the 'landmark report' stated 'there is much more that the Commonwealth could and should be doing'.

The CCRF strongly supports this call for the government to take the issue seriously. Chair Andrew Plympton said 'this is a life and death issue affecting many people. No one signed up for permanent, progressive brain damage. Further, reducing head trauma is critical to ensuring participation in sport remains high in Australia'. "The real concern the CCRF has with the report is the lack of urgency to act now. To change protocols immediately and to take the inquiry inputs as a desperate call for immediate change to protect our current and future sportspeople at all levels. Additionally, to put the right supports in place for past players and their families living with the horrific nightmare of CTE and other Traumatic Brain Injury symptoms. Some, and too many, sadly, who have suicided as a result of their injuries".

It has been nearly 30 years since the National Health and Medical Research Council, the government's public health agency, called for precautionary action on this issue. However, governments have been slow to act on repeated calls for a national strategy to what is fundamentally a public health concern. Millions of Australians play contact/collision sports and concussion and CTE is seriously under-reported. In the last decade, the number of concussions in Australian football, both at the community and elite levels, has escalated significantly, particularly at junior levels. In contrast, concussion in football in the USA is reducing due to the rapid expansion of non-contact Flag football, America's fastest growing team sport.

In 1990, Australian football (AFL) and soccer had about the same number of players nationally. Now soccer has twice the number of players, and basketball 30% more, than AFL. Parents are voting with their feet.

The Senate report follows on from a similar process in the UK Parliament in 2021 which has led to immediate action in a number of key areas including the development of shared concussion protocols across all contact sports, including a minimum 21 day return to play timeframe, as well as a concussion passport.

The 2023 Senate Committee report recommends:

- That it is imperative that governments and sporting bodies **act immediately with precautionary, preventative measures.**
- The Federal government develops a **national sports injury database** as a matter of urgency.
- An **independent expert body develops a nationally consistent concussion/CTE strategy** and binding return-to-play rules for all contact sports, **including 21 days out**, to protect against head trauma. Currently, a 'high level of confusion' exists with sports having differing approaches.
- That sporting organisations should **consider rule modifications to minimise concussion risk.**

- The federal government should also find ways to **enable independent, co-ordinated research funding of concussions and repeated head trauma in sport, including CTE**, and to ensure the integrity of this research.
- It was **“unsatisfactory and inequitable” that professional players were excluded from workers’ compensation schemes**, and recommended that state and territory governments explore how to include sportspeople in their schemes, and that past players with health issues need to be much better supported.

Senator Rice said she hoped the federal government took the report seriously and would move quickly to implement the recommendations. “Many of them are couched in terms of recommending that the government ‘consider’ taking action,” she said. “I urge the government to move beyond considering and to urgently take the concrete actions that we have raised’.

The CCRF submission to the Senate Inquiry recommended a national target of reducing concussion in collision sports by 25% per annum be adopted and that regular brain scan testing of all elite players be instituted from 2024, in addition to safer match rules for juniors (no contact) and females, and a concussion passport for all participants in contact sports.

Not all risk can be removed from sport, but sport must not be allowed to destroy lives. The brain is special and needs to be better protected. Unless the government responds appropriately to this Senate Inquiry report, concussion in sport will be front page news on a much more frequent basis in the near future.

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About CCRF:

Community Concussion Research Foundation Ltd (CCRF) is a not-for-profit registered charity established by founder Peter Jess in 2021 with the following objectives:

1. Promote the prevention or control of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and concussions within a sport setting.
2. Create a Community Concussion Research facility
3. Collaborate with local and international researchers
4. Work with peak sporting bodies to facilitate the implementation and running of concussion rehabilitation and return to play protocols
5. Partner or collaborate with other organisations to pursue related, similar or compatible activities relating to prevention and control of TBI, CTE, and concussion.
6. Provide support/advice to families impacted by TBI caused by collision sports

The CCRF emphasises the importance of providing a safe playing space for all participants in collision-based sports, whether that be at the grass-roots or elite levels. Additionally, CCRF will use best practice science and medical advice to develop proactive intervention, mitigation and prevention strategies to create safer sporting environments.

The voluntary CCRF Board members: Andrew Plympton (Chair), Professor Mark Cook, Peter Jess, Damien Meredith, Brian Roe, Jenny Bromley, John Hennessy, Susan Rudolph

CEO: Peter Jess

12/9/2023.