

COMMUNIQUE

National Site of Recognition for thalidomide survivors and their families Steering Committee Meeting #4 – 2 March 2023

The Australian Government is establishing a National Site of Recognition for thalidomide survivors and their families, as part of the broader package of support under the Australian Thalidomide Survivors Support Program.

The project is being led by the Department of Health in collaboration with the National Capital Authority (NCA). A Steering Committee, comprised of four (4) thalidomide survivors and a carer/partner representative, was formed in October 2021, to provide advice relating to the location and design of the National Site of Recognition for thalidomide survivors and their families, as well as its official dedication (opening).

The Steering Committee, chaired by Ms Carita Davis, Assistant Secretary, Preventive Health and Food Branch, is managed by the Australian Thalidomide Survivors Support Program Team.

The Steering Committee met for the fourth time on 2 March 2023 via video/teleconference.

MEETING #4 – DISCUSSION AND CONSIDERATIONS

The main areas for discussion related to the descriptive written elements of the National Site of Recognition, including a timeline outlining the history of thalidomide to be sandblasted into the concrete pavement, words portraying the thalidomide experience to be etched into the glass brick structure and explanatory text for an interpretive sign to be located at the site.

The NCA provided an update on the progress of the National Site of Recognition. The Committee was informed that in late 2022 a tender process was undertaken to engage a head contractor to build the National Site of Recognition, in January 2023 a contractor was engaged, and site works commenced.

The Committee then discussed the descriptive written elements of the National Site of Recognition. The Chair outlined the purpose and requirements for the timeline of the history of thalidomide in Australia. The Committee was informed that as part of the National Site of Recognition design, a timeline would be sandblasted into the concrete path at the site. Members discussed and advised on the proposed milestone points of the timeline and made a number of suggestions, particularly in relation to the date of thalidomide availability and withdrawal in Australia.

The Committee then discussed the words portraying the thalidomide experience. The Chair outlined the purpose and requirements for the words and informed members that as part of the design, words of significance representing the experience of thalidomide survivors would be sandblast etched into the face of the glass brick structure. The Chair explained that following agreement by the Committee of a selection of possible words, a survey would be undertaken to seek the views of thalidomide survivors, their families, friends and carers. The Committee discussed the example words that had been drawn from previous consultation points. Members agreed on a collection of 27 words to inform the survey with thalidomide survivors.

The Committee then discussed the information for the interpretive sign. The Chair informed the Committee the sign would be displayed at the National Site of Recognition and would include a description of the purpose of the site and the history of thalidomide in Australia. Members discussed and advised on the proposed draft text for the sign. The Secretariat agreed to seek some further advice on questions raised by Members and to circulate the updated wording to Members out-of-session for their agreement.

The Committee was informed that following their agreement of the timeline of the history of thalidomide in Australia and the text for the interpretive sign, the descriptive written elements would be progressed for consideration by the NCA and the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP. In addition, the words of significance, as determined by the survey responses, would also be provided for information.

NEXT STEPS

The following next steps were agreed:

- A survey would be undertaken with thalidomide survivors on the words of significance for the National Site of Recognition.
- The initial draft timeline of the history of thalidomide in Australia and text for the interpretive sign would be amended to reflect the Committee's discussions and then circulated to Members out-of-session for agreement.