

COMMUNIQUE

National Site of Recognition for thalidomide survivors and their families Steering Committee Meeting #6 – September 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 (Program).

The project is being led by the Department of Health and Aged Care (Department) 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 sixth time in September 2023 via video/teleconference.

MEETING #6 – DISCUSSION AND CONSIDERATIONS

The Steering Committee was provided with an update on the National Site of Recognition and was informed that construction of the site was on track for completion in late-October 2023.

The Steering Committee was informed that the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, will deliver a National Apology to all Australians impacted by the Thalidomide Tragedy in the House of Representatives, likely to occur in late November 2023. The Steering Committee was also informed that a complementary Dedication Ceremony to officially present the National Site of Recognition will take place on the day following the National Apology.

The Steering Committee was provided with information about how both events would likely occur, covering the proposed invitees, events logistics, program for the Dedication Ceremony and associated financial contribution for thalidomide survivors registered with the Program. The Chair noted the final content and format of the National Apology and the program for the Dedication Ceremony would be guided by the Prime Minister and his office, as well as the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP.

Members were provided the opportunity to discuss the proposed events and identify any concerns or considerations to ensure the planning and delivery of these events meets the requirements of thalidomide survivors. Members raised the following concerns for consideration:

- Thalidomide survivors are varied in their ability and/or willingness to travel to Canberra to attend these events. Support is necessary to ensure all thalidomide survivors have the opportunity to attend or participate in commemorative activities, regardless of their circumstances.
- The events may overwhelm or cause distress to some individuals. Counsellors and support people for the events should be made available.
- The parents of some thalidomide survivors will also be in attendance and may also require support.
- Many survivors will have not met previously. As such it will be important to provide an opportunity for this to occur away from the official events and potential media presence.
- Formal speakers participating in the Dedication Ceremony should be familiar to the Australian thalidomide survivor community.

The Steering Committee discussed a potential opportunity for representatives of the Steering Committee to formally participate in the Dedication Ceremony. Ms Lisa McManus and Mr Timothy Loughry expressed an interest in participating in the formalities.

The Chair explained that once the date had been confirmed, a formal invitation to the National Apology and Dedication Ceremony would be sent to all thalidomide survivors registered with the Program, as well as other invited guests.

NEXT STEPS

The following next steps were agreed:

- A Save the Date notice for the National Apology and Dedication Ceremony would be sent to all thalidomide survivors registered with the Program.
- The Department to seek Ministerial approval of the speakers for the Dedication Ceremony.