



Australian Government

# *Dedication Ceremony*

National Site of Recognition  
for Thalidomide Survivors  
and their Families





# **The National Site of Recognition for Thalidomide Survivors and their Families**

The Honourable Mark Butler MP,  
Minister for Health and Aged Care,  
on behalf of the Australian Government,  
welcomes thalidomide survivors and their guests  
to the Dedication Ceremony to officially  
unveil the National Site of Recognition  
for Thalidomide Survivors and their Families.

Thursday, 30 November 2023  
Kings Park, Wendouree Drive, Parks, Canberra



**The National Site of Recognition for Thalidomide Survivors and their Families was established by the Australian Government to acknowledge the thalidomide tragedy in Australia.**

**The National Site of Recognition Steering Committee and thalidomide survivors registered with the Australian Thalidomide Survivors Support Program, their families, friends and carers helped to inform the selection of the location and the design of the site.**



While we cannot change the past or end the physical suffering, I hope this permanent reminder will help heal some of the emotional wounds.

**The Honourable Mark Butler MP,  
Minister for Health and Aged Care**



### **The following text is displayed on a sign at the Site:**

This Site acknowledges the thalidomide tragedy in Australia. It honours the pain and suffering experienced by survivors, the memory of those who died prematurely, as well as the impact on their loved ones.

Thalidomide is a drug developed in the 1950s by the German pharmaceutical company, Chemie Grünenthal GmbH. It was officially distributed for sale in Australia from 1960–1961, however in some circumstances was available outside of this period. Thalidomide was used to treat a range of ailments, including morning sickness during pregnancy.

In late 1961, the connection between the maternal use of thalidomide during pregnancy and birth malformations came to light. It is estimated that over 10,000 babies were affected worldwide, with around 40 per cent of affected babies dying during their first year of life. Thalidomide affected every aspect of those it touched.

The thalidomide tragedy showed the importance of evaluating the safety and efficacy of medicines and therapeutic goods in Australia. Consequently, the Australian Drug Evaluation Committee was established in 1963, with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) officially established in 1989.

In 2020, the Australian Government acknowledged the plight of Australia's thalidomide survivors and their families, by providing lifetime support to survivors.

The National Site of Recognition features a contemplative space for reflection, a symbolic glass brick gateway incorporating a ripple effect acknowledging the pervasive and enduring impact of thalidomide, and a historical timeline.

It serves as a lasting reminder to all Australians that the lessons of the thalidomide tragedy must never be forgotten.



The Site of Recognition serves to acknowledge those whose lives were forever impacted by the drug thalidomide;

recognise those who have lived with profound and lifelong injuries;

honour those who went unrecognised or died prematurely; and

respect those who provide us with support — our parents, families, and friends.

We should never be forgotten.

**Ms Lisa McManus**  
**(Thalidomide survivor and Advocate)**





## Design elements

The design features a glass brick structure that is symbolic of a human life, with the glass bricks representing the units of the cells of the human body.

The void and walkway represent the hole in the lives of those impacted by thalidomide. The walkway frames a view to the lake offering hope and a sense of fulfilment.

The bricks represent strength and resilience, while the glass material is symbolic of the fragility of life, and the importance of transparency and reflection.

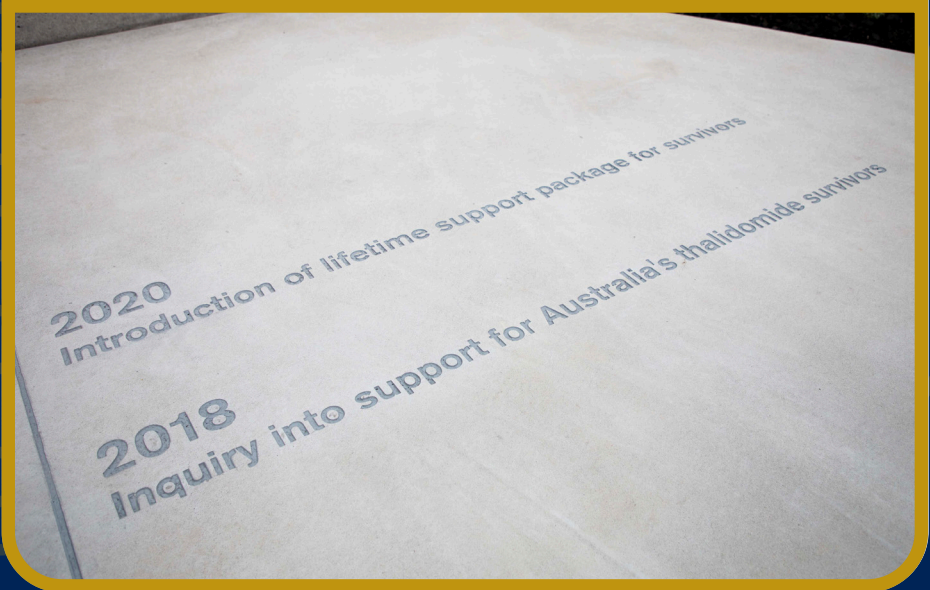
The ripple effect on the façade signifies the pervasive and enduring impact of thalidomide on individuals, as well as their families and friends.

The glass walkway features words etched into the glass bricks. These words were determined by thalidomide survivors, their family, friends and carers to help convey the significance and impact of the tragedy.



The words portray the strength and courage of survivors, as well as acknowledge the trauma and loss experienced.

The timeline of events provides a historical outline of the thalidomide tragedy and offers an opportunity for education and improved awareness.







A seating area offers a place for reflection and contemplation.



Humanity's greatest public memorials all stand in silent recognition of horrors past which can never be made right... so it is for the survivors of thalidomide and their families.

I hope this memorial tells our thalidomide community that Australians acknowledge your pain, admire your courage, grieve for those lost and learn from the failures of the world's worst pharmaceutical disaster.

**Mr Peter Gordon AM (Senior Partner, Gordon Legal)**



# Dedication Ceremony Program

- 10.30am**      **Introductions and Welcome**  
**Ms Tania Rishniw MC**  
Former Deputy Secretary,  
Department of Health and Aged Care
- 10.35am**      **Welcome to Country**  
**Aunty Serena Williams**  
Ngunnawal – Wiradjuri Elder
- 10.40am**      **Keynote Address**  
**The Hon Mark Butler MP**  
Australian Government,  
Minister for Health and Aged Care
- 10.55am**      **Personal reflections**  
**Ms Lisa McManus OAM**  
Thalidomide survivor  
Director of Thalidomide Group Australia  
Member of the National Site of Recognition  
Steering Committee

**11.05am**      **Personal reflections**  
**Mr Peter Gordon AM**  
Senior Partner, Gordon Legal and  
Advocate for thalidomide survivors

**11.15am**      **Personal reflections**  
**Mrs Wendy Rowe**  
Mother of thalidomide survivor

**11.20am**      **Personal reflections**  
**Mr Timothy Loughry**  
Thalidomide survivor  
Member of the National Site of  
Recognition Steering Committee

**11.25am**      **Official Dedication**  
**The Hon Mark Butler MP and**  
**Ms Lisa McManus OAM**

**11.30am**      **Closing Remarks**  
**Ms Tania Rishniw**  
Former Deputy Secretary,  
Department of Health and Aged Care



**Ms Tania Rishniw**

Former Deputy Secretary,  
Department of Health and Aged Care



**Aunty Serena Williams**

Ngunnawal – Wiradjuri Elder and  
Traditional Custodian



**The Hon Mark Butler MP**

Australian Government,  
Minister for Health and Aged Care



**Ms Lisa McManus OAM**

Thalidomide survivor  
Director of Thalidomide Group Australia  
Member of the National Site of  
Recognition Steering Committee



**Mr Peter Gordon AM**

Senior Partner, Gordon Legal and  
Advocate for thalidomide survivors



**Mrs Wendy Rowe**

Mother of thalidomide survivor



**Mr Timothy Loughry**

Thalidomide survivor  
Member of the National Site of  
Recognition Steering Committee



This site, in part signifies our resilience  
as victims of thalidomide.

60 plus years of overcoming and  
adapting to our injuries.

60 plus years of seeking justice  
for gross negligence.

We are unique people. This is a unique site.

It will shine, just like the children who  
couldn't make it.

It will shine, just like we do.

**Mr Timothy Loughry**  
**(Thalidomide survivor)**



