



Providing health care to a thalidomide survivor fact sheet

This factsheet has been prepared by the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department). It contains an overview of the use and impact of thalidomide in Australia during the early 1960's, and outlines sources for further information, to help facilitate discussions between thalidomide survivors and their health care practitioners.

History of thalidomide

Chemie Grünenthal, a German pharmaceutical company, developed thalidomide in the 1950s and it was marketed internationally as a non-addictive sedative. In Australia, the drug was licenced by the Distillers Company Ltd and was available over the counter in all states other than Queensland, where a prescription was required. The drug was available for sale in Australia between 1 August 1960 and 29 November 1961, after which the Distillers Company Ltd withdrew it from the market due to safety concerns.

Thalidomide injuries

A thalidomide survivor is an individual who has been impacted by the maternal ingestion of thalidomide during pregnancy. Thalidomide embryopathy is known to have a wide range of potential impacts on development in-utero. The type and extent of injuries vary greatly between individual thalidomide survivors. In addition to congenital malformations present at birth, thalidomide survivors may experience additional health challenges because they have had to adapt their behaviours and use their bodies differently to account for their thalidomide injuries.

Support available for Australian thalidomide survivors

The Australian Thalidomide Survivors Support Program (the Program) was established by the Australian Government in response to the recommendations of the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into support for Australia's thalidomide survivors. The Program is a lifetime support package for recognised thalidomide survivors that acknowledges the pain and suffering of survivors and helps with out-of-pocket health care costs and daily living costs. As a participant in the Program, survivors may be able to access a one-off lump sum payment and ongoing annual payments, as well as access to a Health Care Assistance Fund and an Extraordinary Assistance Fund, to assist with health care expenses and activities of daily living. Further information about the Program can be found at: www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/australian-thalidomide-survivors-support-program.

The Department has established a Thalidomide Support Service to assist survivors to access support both from the Program and from other government and community services, including the NDIS. Information on how to contact the Thalidomide Support Service can be found at: www.benevolent.org.au/thalidomidesupportservice.

Further learning

The Royal Australian College of Physicians has prepared an online learning module to educate health care practitioners on caring for patients impacted by the maternal ingestion of thalidomide. This course was developed in response to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into

support for Australia's thalidomide survivors interim report and can be accessed for free at:
elearning.racp.edu.au/course/search.php?search=thalidomide.

The interim and final reports of the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into support for Australia's thalidomide survivors include testimonies and submissions from thalidomide survivors which describe their lived experience, including with the medical system. Both reports can be accessed at:

www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/ThalidomideSurvivors.