

Mental health stigma blocks jobs

MPs call for awareness and action.



STANDING OUT: Stigma isolating job seekers with mental illness

A national education campaign is needed to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and help sufferers into education and employment.

In its latest report, *Work wanted*, the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee has called for a comprehensive, multifaceted campaign in schools, businesses and communities to raise awareness of mental ill health and break down discrimination.

One in five Australians has experienced a mental illness in the past 12 months and the employment rate for people with such a disability is around half of the general population.

Tabling the report in the House of Representatives, committee chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said such a campaign is needed as stigma is consistently rated as the key barrier to entering the workforce by people with a mental illness.

“This is not the first report to note the entrenched stigma surrounding those with a mental illness,” Ms Rishworth said. “Nonetheless, the committee was struck by how pervasive stigma remains.”

The report found the stigma associated with mental illness is often based on incorrect assumptions that people with mental ill health have limited capacity or will to participate, or that they will be disruptive and dangerous.

Witnesses to the inquiry reported that disclosing mental ill health lowered the likelihood of selection for interview or appointment to a position.

“When you have a mental illness, employers think of you as a liability,” New South Wales Consumer Advisory Group CEO Julie Hourigan-Ruse said. “Some of them think that you’re likely to be an axe-murderer.”

The committee called for government support of social enterprises that assist people with a mental illness into the workforce, the extension of the primary school mental health program KidsMatter into high schools, and better

LATEST

NEW CHARITIES COMMISSION

A new national regulator for the charity and not-for-profit sector is set to become fully operational from 1 October 2012, replacing a number of overlapping state, federal and territory oversight bodies.

The Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) will provide a central point for the registration of Australian charities, determine charitable status and public benevolent institution status, and provide a free, searchable charities register to the public.

It will also investigate allegations of misconduct and inappropriate activities by charities.

The ACNC will begin by only overseeing the operations of

Australia’s charities, but is intended to extend across the entire not-for-profit sector from 2014.

However decisions about what tax concessions are available to a charity or not-for-profit organisation and the collection or enforcement of taxes in the sector will remain the responsibility of the Australian Taxation Office.

The House Economics Committee is inquiring into the exposure draft legislation establishing the new regulator and is expected to report back following the parliament’s winter break. •

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training for education providers to assist students with mental health issues.

Deputy chair Rowan Ramsey (Grey, SA) said fostering a supportive educational and work environment through these measures is crucial to help people with a mental illness participate fully in society.

“The loss of employment, or the inability to engage in it in the first place, because of mental illness is a debilitating barrier which can lead to disconnection from society and exacerbate the original condition,” Mr Ramsey said. “The cost to society of this disconnection is far higher than the cost of positive programs to engage these people.”

The committee also called for a communication campaign to clearly lay out the eligibility and workforce participation requirements that apply to the Disability Support Pension for people with a mental illness.

Ms Rishworth said a third of DSP recipients have a mental illness, and fear of losing access to payments is holding many back from the workforce.

“The system must encourage and engage rather than discourage and disengage job seekers,” she said.

“Participation requirements need to be sufficiently flexible for people to venture into employment without the fear of losing their benefit entitlement and in the knowledge that there is a safety net for them should a job not work out.”

Ms Rishworth said given the high prevalence of mental illness in the broader community and current workforce shortages in parts of the country, helping more people with a mental illness into work would have broad economic and social benefits.

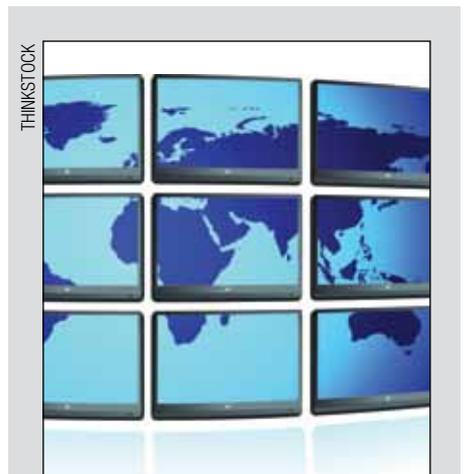
“The statistics are such that, even if we ourselves do not experience a mental illness, we will certainly know someone close to us who does.

“It is in everyone’s interest to help job seekers with a mental illness secure sustainable employment.

“They want to work, and work is part of their recovery – and this report shows that there are ways for them to find work.” •

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TENDER SUBJECT: *Australia Network controversy continues*

PM’S DEPARTMENT DISPUTES TENDER CONFUSION

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has denied there was an “atmosphere of uncertainty” about the role of cabinet during the Australia Network tender process, which was scrapped in November 2011.

Responding to a critical report from the Auditor-General on the tender process, the department’s deputy secretary Renee Leon said the Prime Minister had advised the final decision would come back to cabinet before the tender was released.

“The department’s view is that there was no uncertainty,” Ms Leon said. “The Prime Minister had made clear – and as the report indicates ministers had agreed in October – that it was to come back to cabinet.”

However the Auditor-General Ian McPhee disagreed, telling federal parliament’s Public Accounts and Audit Committee his investigation clearly found confusion about the role of ministers in choosing a preferred tenderer to operate the network.

“I think we have put a fair bit of evidence in there to say there is quite a deal of uncertainty amongst ministers about the processes both before the tender arrangement and subsequently,” Mr McPhee said.



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The Australia Network is Australia's international television service, which broadcasts local and international news, sport and lifestyle programs in more than 44 countries across Asia, the Pacific and the Indian subcontinent. It has been operated by the international arm of the ABC since 2001, and the operation contract was put out to open tender at the start of 2011.

The tender process was halted by the government in November last year on public interest grounds following repeated leaking of tender information to the media, with the service eventually to be transitioned to the ABC permanently by the government.

While the Auditor-General's report did not make any specific recommendations, it identified several "lessons learned" that could be applied to inform future procurement activities. As well as finding there needed to be more clarity about the role of senior decision makers in the tender, the Auditor-General's report also suggested a greater focus on following information security protocols to reduce the risk of leaking of sensitive and confidential material.

"Briefings prepared for ministers should have had greater regard to the confidentiality and sensitivity of the information being provided for what was still a 'live' tender process," Mr McPhee said.

"Ultimately, information was not as tightly controlled as it should have been."

The report also highlighted the importance of departments adhering to conventional procurement arrangements and effectively managing the range of risks involved, given they can change significantly over time. ●

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HOMEGROWN HORROR: *Australians implicated in potential attacks*

Terrorist attacks foiled but threats remain

More than 150 active investigations pursued.

Four potential mass casualty attacks have been disrupted in the past decade by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).

In a submission to federal parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, ASIO said while the threats have been inspired by ideologies imported from overseas, the individuals involved have largely been Australians.

ASIO also told the committee during 2010/11 it pursued more than 150 active counter terrorism investigations.

"The threat of home grown extremism will continue, particularly given the increased technological sophistication of international extremists," ASIO said.

There has been an increasing prevalence of stand-alone or small terrorist cells with little international or group affiliations, making them difficult to detect by security organisations.

ASIO said one important way to limit internal threats is to withhold passports to certain individuals, preventing them from travelling overseas to train, support or participate in terrorism.

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The Minister for Foreign Affairs cancelled or denied seven passports in 2010/11 resulting from adverse security assessments, prohibiting the travel of several people for terrorism related activities.

Ties between Australian intelligence agencies and their foreign counterparts are being strengthened to effectively identify people attempting to enter Australia who pose a security threat.

Visa applications requiring ASIO security checks have increased significantly, placing pressure on the agency. In 2010/11, ASIO completed 34,396 visa security assessments, with 45 adverse assessments issued, 40 of which were on terrorism grounds.

For the same period, the number of complaints to the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security by visa applicants increased by nine per cent, attributed to the growing number of security assessments required by ASIO and the subsequent backlogs.

ASIO has received increasing powers and capabilities to neutralise international threats, ensure Australia's territorial and border integrity and combat people smuggling. These legislative changes follow a number of previous amendments that provided ASIO greater and more intrusive investigative powers.

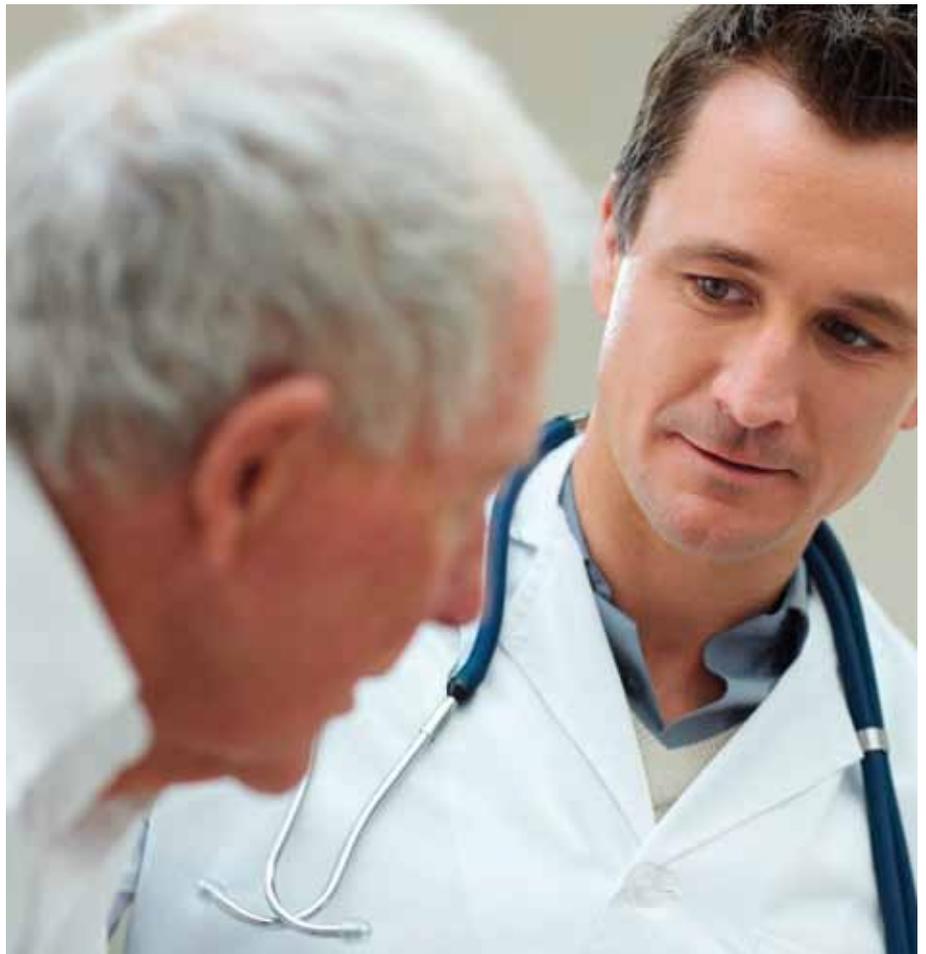
Under warrant, ASIO can enact its powers of intrusive investigation on Australians and within Australia relating to terrorism matters.

ASIO said Australia is experiencing emerging complexities in its security environment and needs to continually review its capabilities to pre-empt the development of increasingly insidious security threats.

"ASIO will need to continue to enhance its capabilities and foster close collaboration with key national and international partners in order to preserve Australia's security," the agency said. •

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PAINFUL LEGACY: *Polio eradicated but many still suffering*

Polio still affecting thousands

Australia is free of polio but thousands of Australians are still affected by the disease.

Many years after recovering from the initial infection, polio survivors are increasingly experiencing the late effects of polio, characterised by symptoms such as fatigue, weakness and pain.

The House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee has recommended measures to better estimate the number of people living with the late effects of polio (sometimes known as post polio syndrome) and increasing awareness of the condition among medical practitioners, medical students and the community.

Presenting the committee's report, based on a roundtable that brought together people interested in the treatment and management

of the condition, committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said with the symptoms being largely unrecognised to date, there is a clear need for improved diagnosis of the late effects of polio.

"Improved diagnosis will lead to better estimates of the prevalence of the condition and in turn better management and treatment outcomes for LEOP/PPS sufferers," he said.

The committee said it is important to determine the prevalence of the condition in order to establish a clearer understanding of the potential demand for services and support.

At the committee's roundtable held in Melbourne, national program manager for Polio Australia, Mary-ann Liethof said very little is known about the prevalence of post polio syndrome in Australia.

“All we can indicate at this point is that there may be anything up to hundreds of thousands of polio survivors living with the late effects of polio in Australia today,” Ms Liethof said.

As the Australian Bureau of Statistics already conducts a number of surveys which examine the health of Australians, the committee has recommended the ABS introduce questions to estimate and report on the late effects of polio.

The committee said measures also need to be taken to improve the capacity of clinicians and other health professionals to recognise the condition and confirm clinical diagnosis.

“There is no simple or definitive test for the condition, and it often takes years of persistence and frustration before sufferers receive a diagnosis,” Mr Georganas said.

Some roundtable participants suggested with the eradication of polio in Australia, health professionals are less aware of polio as a problem and medical students were not being taught about it in their undergraduate training. As a result many health professionals may not even consider the late effects of polio as a possible diagnosis.

To help raise awareness of the condition the committee has recommended that the relevant national boards, in consultation with key stakeholders, ensure curricula for medical students includes information on the late effects of polio.

The committee has also called for communication strategies that go beyond just educating health professionals to raise awareness in the wider community as well.

Mr Georganas said increasing community awareness could help to identify polio survivors with late effects of polio symptoms who, being unaware of the condition, may not have mentioned a history of polio to their GPs or other health professionals providing treatment. •

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Epidemic defence starts overseas

Cross border collaboration vital for disease control.



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DISEASE CONTROL: Collaboration needed with regional neighbours

Infectious disease experts have called on the government to further develop international disease control protocols and maintain adequate drug stockpiles to limit the impact of future disease epidemics in Australia.

Adrian Sleight, professor of Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, told a parliamentary roundtable Australia is confronting new or re-emerging infectious diseases at a rate of 50 to 90 per decade, mainly through cross border transmission.

Professor Sleight presented *Epidemics in a changing world*, a report he co-authored with an expert committee, which recommended Australia maintain

its human capacity to combat epidemics, ensure its capability to collect, analyse and interpret disease information, and maintain vaccine stocks and production, particularly for influenza and niche vaccines.

Australia holds valuable influenza vaccine stockpiles which are effective in patient management and controlling disease outbreaks.

The report says stockpiling of antivirals is vital to ensure their availability during times of manufacturer supply shortage such as during epidemics.

Professor Sleight told the House of Representatives Health Committee Australia needs to collaborate with neighbouring states to contain the

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spread of infectious diseases, which become especially dangerous as they cross borders.

“We are dealing with the intersection of the environments and the lifelines of at least two different organisms,” Professor Sleight said. “The situation may be quite unstable and expansive, creating an explosive epidemic such as when we were confronted with SARS and avian influenza.”

The risk of transfer of infectious diseases to Australia is heightened by the lack of biomedical expertise in neighbouring states in the Asian region.

Professor Tania Sorrell of the Emerging Infections and Bio-security Institute said the key to protecting Australia may lie in capacity building beyond our borders.

“When we think about emerging infectious diseases within Australia, we are thinking about what we can do within our own borders – to detect them, to control them,” Professor Sorrell said.

“But we need to recognise that the Asia-Pacific region is quite an important incubator for emerging infectious diseases and for increasing antimicrobial resistance.

“Perhaps we should be looking to develop collaborative interactions with strategic partners in the region so that we can actually anticipate some of these problems and prevent them reaching our borders.”

The infectious diseases roundtable was the first in a series of roundtables looking at policy responses to health issues that cross international borders.

Committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said the roundtables will provide an important insight into protecting national population health in a globalised world.

“Specifically, the committee will investigate how government and non-government agencies protect our country from exposure to imported infectious diseases, and the risk of epidemic and pandemic disease outbreaks,” he said. •

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Coordination vital on baby alcohol disorders

Complex issue needs whole-of-government approach.



DAMAGED BY DRINK: *Unborn at risk from alcohol during pregnancy*

Federal government departments have called for a national strategy to cover the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

In evidence to a parliamentary inquiry, representatives from three federal departments – Health and Ageing (DoHA); Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); and Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) – said while a number of programs and strategies focus on alcohol harm reduction, there is currently no Commonwealth policy strategy specifically dedicated to FASD prevention.

“Alcohol consumption during pregnancy can cause a range of abnormalities in the unborn child which are included under the umbrella term Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD),” DoHA and FaHCSIA told the committee in a joint submission.

“People affected by FASD experience a range of difficulties including low IQ, learning difficulties, developmental delays and behavioural problems. Secondary outcomes may include: mental health problems; drug and alcohol issues; poor social, educational and employment outcomes; and a high

level of contact with the criminal justice system.”

The departments told the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee the primary and secondary impact of FASD on individuals, their families and the community is wide-ranging and crosses many portfolio areas such as physical and mental health, early childhood, education, disability, family and community services (including child protection), employment, housing and the criminal justice sector.

“Clearly, given the association with the potential harms of alcohol consumption for the developing foetus during pregnancy, prevention of FASD is a significant priority,” the departments said.

In planning for future activity, the departments consider FASD should be managed as a whole of population issue, with targeted approaches for at risk populations, and coordinated whole-of-government responses.

The departments said the prevalence of FASD often is concentrated in families and communities that have myriad risks and social challenges, all of which need to be accommodated in approaches to FASD prevention.

DEEWR branch manager Russell Ayers told the committee education is

an important factor in addressing the intergenerational prevalence of FASD.

“It is important to emphasise the role of education to break intergenerational trends and a whole range of negative social behaviours and outcomes, including alcohol and its impact,” Dr Ayers said.

While there is a range of programs and support for parents, children and students in various circumstances, DEEWR does not have a specific targeted set of programs around FASD.

Dr Ayers said with the major work around developing a national curriculum, DEEWR hopes to provide a national approach to the responsible consumption of alcohol during pregnancy.

But without national data that can reliably indicate the number of people with FASD, it is difficult to identify groups at risk.

Health department principal medical advisor Bernie Tower said the department is developing a diagnostic tool that will outline an agreed multidisciplinary approach to both the diagnosis and ongoing management of the condition.

Colleen Krestensen, health department assistant secretary, said the whole intent of getting better at diagnosis is to link the assessment to appropriate early intervention, to address the early trajectory of the condition, to minimise the secondary impact and also to link parents to the best services to support them.

“That is why we are trying to advance our knowledge collectively across government about the best form of intervention – both early and later – and how to link services to best meet the needs of these kids,” Ms Krestensen said.

While acknowledging there is a growing awareness about FASD in the community, the federal departments said it remains a complex issue which needs a concerted and coordinated effort with respect to research, prevention and services. •

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DEFENCE DIGITAL MEDIA

BRINGING THEM BACK: *Injured soldiers need support in the field and at home*

Review of care for wounded Defence personnel

With 227 Australian Defence Force personnel wounded or injured in Afghanistan since 2002, a parliamentary inquiry will investigate how the ADF manages and supports these soldiers, sailors and air crew.

Personnel who are wounded on operations and suffer relatively minor injuries are treated and, once fit, return to service.

ADF personnel who are seriously wounded are transferred to the nearest military hospital and may be sent to a specialist facility for additional treatment. They may also be returned to Australia for additional treatment and rehabilitation.

ADF rehabilitation programs aim to reduce the impact of injury or illness through early clinical intervention and lessen any psychological effects of the injury.

Chair of federal parliament's Defence Sub-Committee Senator Mark Furner (Qld) said it was of paramount importance that the systems and processes to care for, repatriate, and

rehabilitate or transition ADF personnel wounded and injured on operations are efficient and effective.

“The inquiry will enable the committee to review current arrangements to ensure they are appropriate to support ADF personnel who have been wounded and injured while serving their country,” he said.

As well as examining care arrangements in operational areas, the inquiry will also look at repatriation arrangements to Australia and the care provided on return to Australia, including ongoing health, welfare and rehabilitation support arrangements.

Return to work arrangements and management of personnel who cannot return to ADF service will also be reviewed, along with the transition from ADF support to managed health care and support by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. •

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STAYING AWAY: *Students are choosing other countries for study*

Reform fatigue affects student numbers

Thirty per cent decline puts industry at risk.

International education providers claim constant reform in the sector is contributing to a severe decline in student numbers, threatening Australia's second largest service export industry.

Student numbers have fallen sharply in recent years, especially from key markets such as India and China.

Concerns about security have previously been highlighted as a major factor in the downturn, following a string of high profile attacks on Indian students in Melbourne in 2009 and 2010.

However Sue Blundell, director of English language learning school English Australia, said recent reforms to requirements for education providers and students are also having a major impact on student numbers.

While the reforms to the Education Services for Overseas Students Act were designed to protect international students, Ms Blundell told a parliamentary roundtable on international education they have actually acted as a disincentive.

"Have the reforms had an impact on addressing our competitiveness? They are making us less competitive," Ms Blundell said. "Our zeal for regulatory reform is putting up compliance costs for our providers, so they see revenue going down and costs going up."

She said the main issue is not the content of the reforms, but the fact that a number of changes to both provider and student requirements have happened close together, confusing prospective students and international education sales agents.

"Whereas Australia is becoming more and more complicated and difficult to understand – with change every six months sometimes – other countries are becoming simpler to understand and are opening up their borders," she said. "Agents and students are losing interest because it is just too hard."

Other experts agreed that many prospective students are deciding against studying in Australia due to a perception that it is too difficult to obtain an appropriate visa.

Dr Helen Forbes-Mewett from Monash University told the roundtable concerns about visa requirements and the ability to work in Australia are often the underlying factor which prevents parents from sending their children to study in Australia.

"About three years ago I was interviewing parents of Chinese students in Beijing, and the parents indicated that safety was very important – because I think they knew that was the focus of my study – but, when questioned, actually it turned out that visa access and the status of education were incredibly important," Dr Forbes-Mewett said.

"The UK and the US were seen as being above Australia, but students came to Australia because they could get easier visa access, and they were prepared to give away some of that perceived status, in their view. That has changed now, because Australia does not hold quite that status that it had before in providing an education.

"That is something that really needs to be regained."

The federal government announced changes to international student visa requirements earlier this year, opening up assessment standards in a bid to attract more applicants.

A new class of student visa is also being introduced, which will give more international students the ability to work in Australia after they have completed their studies.

While Ms Blundell said the changes were appropriate, she indicated better communication of requirements to key stakeholders and a period of stability are needed to help the industry get back on track.

"We have now been in decline for two and a half years, and in fact our student numbers over that two and a half year period have declined by 30 per cent," Ms Blundell said.

"Our industry is in danger of disappearing. We are in danger, I believe, of having the best consumer protection system in the world but no consumers to enjoy that protection." •

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Libraries face growing cyber demand

Seniors seek help to log on safely.



HELP DESK: Libraries can provide cyber training for seniors

Libraries are in a prime position to help seniors have a safe online experience, but the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has told federal parliament's Cyber-Safety Committee they are constrained by the limited resources currently available to them.

With the number of Australians aged over 65 growing rapidly, ALIA said libraries are reporting a growth in membership and demand with many seniors seeking assistance and training to help them take advantage of the benefits the internet brings.

"This ever-increasing demand includes help with everyday needs such as setting up email accounts, online

banking, setting up mobile phones, completing government forms, accessing e-government information, applying for Centrelink benefits, etc," ALIA said in its submission to the committee's inquiry into cybersafety for seniors.

ALIA said with more funding libraries could reach a wider group within the community and could provide services such as internet training for those who are housebound.

It has called for a comprehensive cybersafety plan for seniors similar to one the federal government launched in 2008 to educate young people about cybersafety.

"The same level of resources and support should also be available to senior Australians in order to prevent

their exploitation, increase their quality of life, and provide them with equal opportunity and access to online resources," ALIA said.

While seniors comprise the fastest growing demographic of online users, the committee has heard a large number of older Australians are still hesitant to go online.

Committee chair Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas) said the committee was looking to find the best ways to get reluctant seniors online safely and upskill competent users without overemphasising the risks.

"Older people who have never worked with computers or who have been retired for a long time can be very intimidated by the internet, or not see its utility," Senator Bilyk said.

ALIA said with a strong presence in most communities, libraries are in a unique position to provide a platform and resources to assist seniors with internet and cybersafety training.

"Public libraries and their partner state libraries offer an existing infrastructure, staff that are connected into their communities, existing local partnerships with seniors groups, and access to those who are socially isolated.

"Libraries are perceived as neutral spaces where people can go and get information and support without judgement. Libraries are trusted places, seen as civic and community spaces where you go to find out something you need to know.

"Communities respond well to initiatives conducted in their local area. Local initiatives are easily accessible, trusted and comfortable." •

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Delay urged for anti-piracy treaty

Independent economic analysis needed.

Federal parliament's Treaties Committee has recommended the controversial Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) not be ratified until certain conditions are met.

ACTA focuses on strengthening intellectual property standards through trademark and copyright enforcement.

It is heavily backed by much of the global entertainment industry, which is losing billions of dollars each year through the illegal downloading and piracy of films and television shows.

However the treaty has been met with international protests from groups concerned about its impact on privacy and freedom of expression.

Committee chair Kelvin Thomson (Wills, Vic) said the treaty has a number of flaws and the committee is not yet convinced it is in Australia's interests.

Mr Thomson said he is particularly concerned about the use of the term 'intellectual property' throughout the text, which may take it beyond the area of simple copyright enforcement.

"If that then becomes a matter of patents being able to be challenged through this process then there is the potential for downside impacts on consumers," Mr Thomson said.

The committee report calls for an independent and transparent economic analysis of the treaty's costs and benefits to be done before Australia considers ratifying the treaty.

The committee was also wary of pre-empting an ongoing Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into copyright in the digital era.

"We want to allow that law reform commission report to proceed and we think that there is a risk if we ratify ACTA now that we will effectively lock



FLAWED: Treaty may impact consumers

out the potential changes that the law reform commission might recommend."

Mr Thomson said the international environment has also played a role in the committee's recommendation to delay ratification. ACTA has been rejected or deferred in a number of similar jurisdictions, including the United States and various European nations.

Mr Thomson said the fate of the treaty internationally should be clearer by the time the recommended analysis of the treaty is complete.

"The law reform commission is not scheduled to bring down its report until late next year so if we are waiting for that report we have time," he said.

"We have time to do the cost benefit analysis properly, and we have time to see what is going on in Europe – whether this treaty has legs and is going to get international support and is going to get off the ground, or whether the revolt we are seeing against it will prevent it from moving forward." •

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PRICE WATCH: IT costs under scrutiny

CUTTING THROUGH IT PRICING

Are Australians paying more for IT software and hardware than consumers in overseas markets and, if so, why?

These are key questions for the House of Representatives Infrastructure and Communications Committee as it undertakes a review of IT pricing in Australia and its impact on consumers, businesses and governments.

"The committee will look into the costs of computer hardware, software, downloads and e-books to name a few," said committee chair Nick Champion (Wakefield, SA). "We look forward to hearing from the companies who set these prices and the consumers and businesses that purchase their products."

Committee member Ed Husic (Chifley, NSW) stressed the economic importance of the issue. From the evidence received by the inquiry, he expects the committee will be able to make recommendations for the market to operate in a way that is fair to businesses and to consumers.

"The internet itself has been estimated to add between \$50 billion and potentially up to \$70 billion to our economic growth," Mr Husic said. "As many jobs are created as a result of the internet in Australia as they are by mining. Within business these days IT is a major capital and operating expense."

Another committee member, Jane Prentice (Ryan, Qld), expressed concern about price disparities faced by consumers.

"Why in this day and age does it cost us more to download an Australian artist on iTunes than it does in the US? That's the sort of thing we need to get to the bottom of," she said.

Deputy chair Paul Neville (Hinkler, Qld) said the inquiry will help to "flush all the issues into the open" and make the market more transparent.

"We've become an easy mark in Australia," he said. "I hope we can drill down to the wholesale levels to find out what the real costs are and come out with a report that hopefully will be a benchmark around which the parliament can base their future work." •

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HARASSED: Millions of workers face bullying during their careers

Rising costs of bullying prompt review

Workplace bullying is costing Australia between \$6 billion and \$36 billion annually, according to estimates from the Productivity Commission. It contributes to decreased productivity, increased staff absenteeism and poor morale.

Research cited by the Australian Human Rights Commission estimates that between 400,000 and 2 million Australians will be harassed at work and 2.5 to 5 million will experience workplace harassment at some time during their careers.

To help tackle the problem, the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee is examining the nature, causes and extent of bullying in the workplace, and will look at ways to combat the workplace cultures that allow bullying to thrive.

Committee chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said workplace bullying can have a profound effect on all aspects of a person's health as well as their work and family life.

"Bullying has serious consequences for individuals and the wider community," Ms Rishworth said.

"Every Australian has a right to feel safe and respected at work."

The experiences of workplace bullying victims will be considered during the inquiry and the committee will also examine the adequacy of existing education and support services.

"While it is not the role of the committee to intervene in or consider individual cases, we welcome submissions from employers, employees and their representative organisations regarding proposals and suggestions for securing workplaces against bullying at a national level," Ms Rishworth said.

The inquiry will also review the effectiveness of existing anti-bullying regulatory frameworks, and investigate how coordination between agencies and research on workplace bullying can be improved.

Public hearings for the inquiry have begun and will continue throughout August in Adelaide, Perth and Canberra. •

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