

Committee Secretary
Honourable members of the Senate
Senate Community Affairs References Committee

I write this letter in support of Thalidomide sufferers with reference to the following terms.

- a) adequacy of compensations and support
- b) responsibility of compensation and support
- c) provision of financial compensation
- d) the role of the Australian Government in compensation and support; and
- e) any related matters

I was first made aware of thalidomide as a young person as my eldest brother was born in August 1962 and my mother had narrowly avoided taking the drug after news reports had started to come out. It wasn't until later in life that I met my wife and now brother-in-law, [REDACTED], a thalidomide sufferer.

The contrast in the opportunity afforded to my own brother and that of my brother-in-law is stark. Discrimination in general has been a massive part of his life let alone the impacts on his health. This reduction in opportunity to earn a decent living and lead a normal life as would be normally afforded to all of our children has come from the impact of this drug. Only more recently is the subject of damage to their whole central nervous system as well, being brought to light. I have seen no evidence of any significant governmental compensation nor support, yet we purport to be a kind nation. We now have the fantastic National Disability Insurance Scheme, of which we should all be proud.

Another National scheme, I believe, was brought about by changes that were recognised in December 1961 by Dr William McBride. The observance of damage caused by thalidomide led eventually through time to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). To ask who is responsible, when clearly there was a failing of oversight by government so significant that this body now exists, must be a clear statement, in and of, itself. The US government was very active in recalling the drug while Australia was remiss in comparison.

If there was no stated responsibility prior, surely there is one implied which is so evident in the formation of the TGA. Indeed, if no responsibility lies with the government for the protection of its own then why not dissolve the TGA? Clearly, it is a fundamental principle of civilised society that government has a role and responsibility and clearly it failed in both of these for those affected by thalidomide.

I sincerely believe that the best way to approach this is to ask yourself not, "what should have been done back then and who's responsible?" but "what should we do now?" If only for the myriad of other problems and associated costs to society and our economy that the formation of the TGA (that came from those affected's circumstances) has prevented then surely, recognise these people for even that contribution to modern society. Through their hardship, thousands of others have been spared similar hardship from other pharmaceuticals by the formation of the TGA.

Indeed, I myself owe a debt of gratitude to these innocent victims and their families who are also victims of thalidomide. I suffered from severe cystic acne and had a drug that was approved called Roaccutane (isotretinoin) which changed my life. It had twenty-six times the chance of causing birth deformities than thalidomide but was able to be taken safely under medical supervision. Without that, I would not have had the confidence to pursue my career (International Airline Captain with a national carrier) and contribute fully to society, including paying significant taxes. Every time a person in Australia takes a drug that has been evaluated properly in Australia, they owe a debt to these people. Next time you either administer medicine to your own children or watch other parents giving a simple pill to their kids for a headache or an upset stomach, think of what it would be like in someone else's shoes..

If collectively you agree to some compensation, a simple levy of 1c per prescription would cover the costs. Just 1c each time. We did it for security measures post 911, surely we can do it for these innocent victims as well.

If, after an inquiry into this, you do nothing then you would have only added insult to injury. I implore all of you as an Australian citizen, "please, do the right thing.."