

EMBARGOED MEDIA RELEASE

Addressing unresolved childhood trauma & abuse in adults would save Australian governments billions each year

Australia, embargoed 04 February 2015: A new report commissioned by Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA) and prepared by Pegasus Economics, released today, showed that as a nation, Australia could save a minimum of \$9.1 billion annually by addressing the impacts of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse in adults¹.

ASCA is the leading national organisation for the estimated five million Australian adult survivors of childhood trauma². With Prime Minister Tony Abbott actively seeking alternatives to the Federal Government's proposals for the Health Budget, ASCA presented these cost savings to the government as part of its pre-budget submission, in the report – *The cost of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse in adults in Australia*.

The report presented evidence-based solutions for the structural budget deficit for the 2015-16 Budget, scheduled for release mid-May 2015. It highlighted the main steps to reduce these costs, including investment in specialist and trauma-informed services, training of primary care and allied health practitioners and accreditation.

The report considered the weighted costs of four of the many trauma-related issues Australian adult survivors of childhood trauma face – alcohol abuse, anxiety/depression, obesity and suicide/attempted suicide. By conservative measures, the cost to the budget of not addressing these impacts totaled a minimum of \$9.1 billion annually for childhood trauma overall; or for child abuse alone, the minimum cost came to \$6.8 billion annually.

The report presented the conservative³ estimated per affected person cost, for each of the four key areas as:

- Alcohol abuse: \$4,983 per person, annually

¹ Childhood trauma includes abuse in all its forms, neglect, growing up with domestic violence and the traumatic impact on children in experiencing a parental divorce or other relationship breakdown, death of a parent, an alcoholic or drug addicted parent, or a parent affected by mental illness or other significant mental health problem.

² Estimated from a range of key resources

³ ASCA's 1300 Professional Support Line Data Report, released in October 2014, established that of those reporting the impacts of their abuse, 72% had experienced multiple impacts. Therefore, the assumption of survivors imposing just one cost is highly conservative.

- Mental illness: \$7,686 per person, annually
- Obesity: \$6,042 per person, annually
- Suicide/attempted suicide: \$5,281 per person, annually

President of ASCA, Dr Cathy Kezelman, said: “The Commonwealth Government’s latest inter-generational report showed the major future stress on government expenditures to be in health outlays⁴. ASCA wishes to work with government in response to the call for policy proposals to reduce health expenditure and improve health outcomes. Our report with Pegasus Economics identifies an area in which substantive real cost savings can be made. The long-term solutions will deliver genuine health outcomes through active, early and comprehensive intervention.”

In the report ASCA outlined the main steps to help address childhood trauma and abuse in adults, which included:

- **Active investment in specialist** services including specialist helplines and online services, which provide support, counseling and resources to promote recovery.
- **More, better trained and accredited treating practitioners** who identify and address the underlying childhood trauma and abuse, rather than solely focusing on the immediate health issues, such as depression and alcoholism.
- **Investing in the training of primary care practitioners.** In strengthening primary health responses survivors can receive the right support, either directly or through targeted referrals, including specialist referral, ideally from an accredited practitioner. This would provide a convenient fail-safe pathway to treatment i.e. No wrong door
- **System, service and institutional improvements.** Raising awareness around the possibility of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse. Financing broad-based implementation of trauma-informed practice responses across health and human services to help minimise the impact of trauma and the risk of re-traumatisation.

Dr Kezelman added: “ASCA has already made a significant contribution to helping address childhood trauma and abuse in Australia through broad-based dissemination of ASCA’s *Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery*⁵. Their national and international uptake has already made a significant impact on public health outcomes.

⁴ Swan, W. (2012). 2010 Intergenerational Report: Australia to 2050: future challenges. Canberra: Commonwealth Government

⁵ Available on ASCA’s website: www.asca.org.au

“However, in order to reduce the costs associated with childhood trauma and abuse, and start to address the budget deficit, all governments need to make the appropriate investments, supporting early active and comprehensive intervention and the reorientation of health care services towards addressing core underlying issues and not just symptoms.”

Help and support is available from the ASCA professional support line on 1300 657 380, 9am- 5pm Monday-Sunday.

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About ASCA: www.asca.org.au

ASCA is the leading national organisation supporting the estimated five million Australian adults who are survivors of childhood trauma, including abuse. ASCA provides hope, optimism and pathways to recovery for adults.

At the forefront of pioneering trauma informed policy, practice and research, ASCA has been instrumental in supporting the work of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and people engaging with it. This includes the training of key workers and practitioners.

In 2012 ASCA released Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery, a global first in setting the standards for clinical and organisational practice. ASCA is a founding member of the national Trauma Informed Care and Practice Advisory Working Group.

Formed in 1995, ASCA provides a range of services including professional phone support with trauma informed counsellors, a referral database, advocacy, research, workshops for survivors and their supporters, along with education, training and professional development for workers, organisations and health care professionals.