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MEDIA RELEASE

TRAUMATIC SPINAL CORD INJURIES: INCREASE IN OVER 65s

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THE incidence of traumatic spinal cord injury has not declined, and in fact has increased for Victorians over the age of 65 years, with subsequent increased strain on support services, according to the authors of research published online today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

"As the mortality associated with traumatic spinal cord injury (TSCI) declines, the number of people living with the condition is increasing, contributing to significant social and economic costs," wrote the researchers, led by Dr Ben Beck, Deputy Head of Prehospital, Emergency and Trauma Research at Monash University in Melbourne. "The total annual costs of TSCI in Australia is estimated to be \$2 billion, including those of prolonged hospitalisation, long-term care, equipment, and productivity losses."

Beck and colleagues set out to investigate trends in the incidence and causes of TSCI in Victoria over a 10-year period by analysing Victorian State Trauma Registry data for people who sustained TSCIs during 2007–2016.

"The overall crude incidence of TSCI was 1.26 cases per 100 000 population, and did not change over the study period," they wrote. "However, the incidence of TSCI resulting from low falls increased by 9% per year."

"Given an absence of a decline in the incidence of TSCI over a 10-year period, enhanced primary prevention activities are required, particularly directed to reducing low falls," said Dr Beck.

Dr Beck also noted that "while low energy mechanisms were the most common cause of TSCI in older adults, high energy events, such as motor vehicle and motorcycle collisions, and high falls, were the leading causes of TSCI in younger adults and children, and continued efforts to prevent these events that result in TSCI are clearly needed."

The proportion of patients who received financial compensation for the costs of their injuries from WorkSafe or the Transport Accident Commission declined from 37% in 2007 (27 cases) to 16% in 2016 (13 cases), reflecting "the concurrent increase in the proportion of low fall-related and decline in that of transport-related TCSI cases".

"This shift will increase the demand from patients under 65 on the recently established National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) once it is fully implemented in late 2020," wrote Beck and colleagues.

"The NDIS does not provide support for people who acquire a disability at age 65 or older; these patients will need alternative types of support, such as that provided by the Australian Government's Home Care Packages program. Ensuring appropriate support for these patients is needed to optimise their recovery and function after a TSCI."

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CONTACTS:

Dr Ben Beck
Deputy Head of Prehospital, Emergency and Trauma Research
Monash University
Ph: 0423 933 775
Email: ben.beck@monash.edu

Dr Andrew Nunn
Director, Victorian Spinal Cord Service
Austin Health
Ph: 0407 524 335