



REAWAKENING THE NATION:

New research reveals sleep disorders cost Australia more than \$5 billion per year

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A new economic report commissioned by the Sleep Health Foundation released today reveals sleep disorders cost the Australian economy more than \$5.1 billion a year in health care and indirect costs. In addition, the reduction in life quality caused by sleep disorders has a further cost equivalent of \$31.4 billion a year. The report, 'Re-awakening Australia – The Economic Cost of Sleep Disorders in Australia' highlights more than 1.5 million Australian adults, 9% of the adult population, now suffer from sleep disorders.

The report looks at the economic impact of major sleep disorders including obstructive sleep apnea, insomnia and restless leg syndrome. While around 9% of the adult population is affected by these disorders, the problem of sleep disorders is in fact greater as only individuals diagnosed with these three conditions have been considered. The report notes better diagnosis and detection, which together with increasing obesity, ageing and stress levels, are increasing the prominence of these conditions. The Sleep Health Foundation is concerned by the scale of problems associated with sleep disorders in Australia.

Professor David Hillman, Chair of the Sleep Health Foundation and director of the West Australian Sleep Disorders Research Institute commented: *"Sleep disorders are debilitating and can cause significant health and relationship problems, as well as effecting productivity in the workplace and at home. Of the \$5.1 billion in financial costs to Australia per year, more than \$800 million is a direct cost to the health system."*

"The high occurrence reflects a better understanding of sleep conditions, but also shows the growing problem of sleep disorders within the Australian population. Besides their own debilitating effects conditions like sleep apnoea can lead to more serious complications such as high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke – which can be life threatening."

The Sleep Health Foundation – Australia's first charity set up to raise awareness of the importance of sleep health – is calling for sleep health to have increased priority on the national health agenda in line with issues such as obesity, exercise, alcohol and smoking.

The Foundation is working to highlight the benefits to Australian businesses and the Government, calling for a national sleep summit to begin creating nationwide action plans. This includes:

1. **Promoting greater recognition** of the value of healthy sleep in Australian workplaces and homes with national preventive health planning;
2. **Diagnosis and treatment:** Supporting GPs in the detection, diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders;
3. **Workplace screening:** For employers to play an increased role in helping diagnose sleep disorders and facilitating treatment, particularly in high risk roles in areas such as transportation, heavy machinery and shift work;
4. **Research and development:** Further investigation on the impact of sleep disorders on specific conditions such as diabetes and on performance in the workplace.

Professor Hillman continued: *“This report considers the cost of sleep disorders alone. It does not consider the additional costs relating to inadequate sleep from poor sleep habits in people without sleep disorders. The Sleep Health Foundation wants to improve the quality of sleep for all Australians.”*

“Poor sleep is increasingly common amongst Australians, with one in three people regularly struggling with their sleep. It is vital that sleep disorders receive increased focus as a health priority. Now that we know the economic costs we hope that we can work with the Australian Government, GPs and employers to re-awaken Australia.”

A significant issue for Australia

The new report found that \$270 million per year is being spent caring for sleep disorders. However they cost \$540 million per year in health care costs for associated conditions and a further \$4.3 billion per year through indirect costs. This includes \$3.1 billion in lost productivity and \$650 million in informal care and other indirect costs resulting from motor vehicle and workplace accidents.

Sleep disorders contribute to other diseases and injuries. The proportion of each condition attributable to a sleep disorder is as follows:

- 10.1% of depression
- 5.3% of stroke
- 4.5% of workplace injuries
- 4.3% of motor accidents.

The ‘Re-Awakening Australia’ report, conducted by Deloitte Access Economics, also found that non-financial costs which place a dollar cost on loss of life quality resulting from sleep disorders contributed a further \$31.4 billion per year to the total economic cost.

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About The Sleep Health Foundation

The Sleep Health Foundation (www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au) is a newly founded community-based charity strongly supported by clinicians and scientists. Its purpose is to raise awareness of sleep health issues and to promote their prevention and control through advocacy, public education and support of research.

About sleep disorders

1. **Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)** is a common yet serious condition which causes interruptions in breathing during sleep. OSA is frequently associated with heavy snoring, choking and gasping during sleep, excessive daytime sleepiness, and serious health complications such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease and stroke. It is estimated that approximately 4.7 per cent of the Australian population suffer from OSA, with two times more men than women affected. However a large number are undiagnosed.
2. **Insomnia** is said to be present when an individual regularly finds it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep. It has several patterns. There may be trouble getting to sleep initially, or a tendency to wake early with trouble achieving sleep. Most people have experienced insomnia symptoms at some time of their lives. Approximately 3 per cent of the population suffers from long-standing primary insomnia and at any given time around 10 per cent of people have at least mild insomnia from a variety of causes.
3. **Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS)** is a movement disorder characterised by uncomfortable sensations in the legs or sometimes the arms which is relieved by movement. The resulting restlessness often interferes with sleep. As many as 2 to 5 percent of the population may be affected, with varying degrees of intensity.

References

www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

The report 'Re-Awakening Australia' was commissioned by the Sleep Health Foundation conducted by Deloitte Access Economics and funded by untied grants from Philips Home Healthcare Solutions, Resmed Asia Pacific Ltd and Fisher and Paykel Healthcare. A full version of the report can be found at www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au