



Media Release

Monday, 3 August 2009

Not knowing is like living in darkness in the search for missing persons

The Governor-General of Australia, Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, will launch National Missing Persons Week in Canberra today.

National Missing Persons Week this year focuses on older people with dementia or memory loss as a significant group at risk of going missing.

Australian Federal Police (AFP) Acting Commissioner Tony Negus said the latest research revealed that older people with dementia or memory loss accounted for a high percentage of missing persons reports.

"Out of the 35,000 people reported missing to police each year in Australia, a high percentage are older people with dementia. In South Australia alone, police data for the period 2005–06 showed that almost half of the people who had gone missing in the lost/wandered category were aged 65 years or over and had dementia," he said.

"The theme this year *'Not knowing is like living in darkness'* reflects the experience of families left behind when someone they care for with dementia disappears.

"The AFP aims to raise awareness of the risks of going missing that are associated with dementia, namely memory loss and wandering. It's a growing area of concern as Australia's population ages," Acting Commissioner Negus said.

Four individual families of missing persons share their experience and the trauma surrounding the 'not knowing' where someone is or whether they are safe.

Karen James' father, Leslie Hicks, has been missing since March 2008. He had early dementia. He was to be at Karen's house for Easter Sunday. It was a five to 10 minute walk but he never made it. No one has seen him since.

"I worry the most when it rains because I don't want dad to be out there in the rain – and that's the darkest time for me," Karen said.

"The longer it goes on I think the chances of him being ok get slimmer but I still have some hope. I think I need to, to go on. Not knowing is the hardest part."

Acting Commissioner Negus said the AFP has partnered with Alzheimer's Australia and Homelessness Australia to further highlight the issue of dementia and the link between missing persons and homelessness.

Chief Executive Officer of Alzheimer's Australia Glenn Rees said "60 per cent of people with dementia live in the community. Their quality of life is dependent on the freedom

to go for a walk or visit friends or engage in social activities. The numbers of people with dementia will double to 460,000 people in the next twenty years.

“Some States, through Alzheimer’s Australia and State-based Police services, have programs designed to return a missing person with dementia safely home, providing quick and accurate identification,” Mr Rees said.

The campaign urges Australians to keep an eye out for older people and to visit www.missingpersons.gov.au for more information.

National Missing Persons Week co-launches with National Homeless Persons Week this year to ask and answer the question ‘Where do they go?’.

105,000 people are homeless each night.

Chairperson for Homelessness Australia Narelle Clay said “jointly launching National Homeless Persons and National Missing Persons Week this year is an opportunity to draw attention to the significant problem of homelessness and the links between these two social issues. The largest single cause of homelessness in Australia is domestic violence – one of the many reasons why someone may go missing. Some older homeless people and young people fleeing child abuse situations can also become part of those defined as missing persons.”

A missing person is anyone who is reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown, and where there are fears for the safety or welfare of that person.

More than 95 per cent of people reported missing in Australia are located within a short period of time, but some 1600 people still remain missing more than six months after they disappeared.

If you think you have information on a missing person, or are interested in learning more about missing persons visit www.missingpersons.gov.au.

Media enquiries

AFP National Media
Ph: (02) 6275 7100

Alzheimer’s Australia
Ph: 0407 232 212

Homelessness Australia
Ph: 0405 385 431

Media opportunity:

Where Federal Ballroom, Hyatt Hotel Canberra

When Monday 3 August 2009 at 10.00am

Speakers Governor-General of Australia, Ms Quentin Bryce AC
Minister for Home Affairs, the Honourable Brendan O’Connor MP
Chairperson, Homelessness Australia, Ms Narelle Clay AM
In attendance: Acting Commissioner Tony Negus, families and friends of missing persons

Media packs Images and video will be available.
Interviews with the above will be managed on request following the launch.