



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed: Tuesday, 17 February 2009, 9.00am

EMPLOYMENT ROUNDTABLE TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Today in Melbourne, MS Australia, Brainlink and member for Deakin, Mike Symon, will host a Ministerial Workforce Participation Roundtable targeting employment retention for people living with a chronic illness.

Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Employment Participation, will be in attendance and will then view a flexible workplace arrangement in person by visiting the Blackburn Animal Hospital. This is the workplace of a person who sustained an acquired brain injury in an accident on her way home from work in 2005. She has been able to retain her employment through the flexibility of her employer.

MS Australia's Manager of Policy & Community Partnerships, Mr Alan Blackwood, stressed the need to maintain a positive view of the skills and contribution of people with chronic illnesses and carers in the tight economic situation.

"Currently, labour market programs focus on finding people jobs but they also need to support people to retain their jobs. Many people with chronic illnesses are diagnosed whilst in employment but need specific support programs to assist them and their employers," he said.

"This ensures they can maintain their employment long term, manage the costs of their illness and build retirement savings through super so they do not become dependant on Government support.

"Discrimination, ignorance and lack of flexibility in the workplace are unfortunately still very common for people living with chronic illness who need additional flexibility at work.

We have identified a number of employers with exemplary practices that support employees with chronic illness or who are family carers and they can provide models for the business community. Modifying duties, educating co-workers, pooling sick leave, providing attendant care and assisting with flexible rostering all contribute to maintaining employment.”

The discussion will involve people with chronic illnesses, employers, carers and support agencies and canvass a range of issues, including:

- Job retention strategies for those requiring additional supports
- Examples from participants about maintaining employment and careers
- Employers workplace initiatives that support employees with a disability or caring issues
- Government services and initiatives contained in the Disability and Mental Health Employment Strategy and Fair Work Australia legislation
- Gaps and opportunities to improve practices across the economy
- The National Disability Strategy

Ends

Media Opportunity

What: Ministerial Workforce Participation Roundtable

When/Where: Tuesday, 17 February 2009

10.00am: Roundtable - The Nerve Centre, 54 Railway Road, Blackburn

12.00pm: Workplace Visit by Minister for Workforce Participation, Brendan O'Connor MP – please call MS Australia for details.

Who: Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Employment Participation; Member for Deakin, Mike Symon, MS Australia, Brainlink; people living with a chronic illness; Carers and Employers.

For further information please contact:

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