

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **HAEMOCHROMATOSIS AUSTRALIA**

#### **Senator hits speed bump**

#### **Haemochromatosis Awareness Week 10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> August**

Three Federal Parliamentarians from three states have been tested for iron overload in the lead up to Haemochromatosis Awareness Week.

West Australian Senator Glenn Sterle has always enjoyed going to the gym and long walks in the Kimberley. Four years ago he experienced increasing fatigue and pain in his joints. "I started to feel tired very often and lost a lot of motivation. It felt like I was getting too old too quickly."

Senator Sterle didn't know he was suffering from iron overload caused by haemochromatosis, the most common inherited condition in Australia.

Tasmanian Senator Catryna Bilyk and Queensland Senator Claire Moore have joined Senator Sterle in a campaign to raise awareness of the condition which can cause chronic fatigue and joint pain. If left untreated it can also cause serious liver and heart problems, arthritis, diabetes and impotence.

Fortunately, Senator Sterle's doctor recognised the symptoms of Haemochromatosis and prescribed the universally accepted treatment, giving blood.

"It's just like going to the Red Cross Blood Service. Giving blood removes iron from the body. Now my haemochromatosis is completely under control" Senator Sterle said.

"This is not a condition that you should ignore because eventually, if untreated, it can cause a lot of damage and be life threatening. I have regular blood tests to monitor my iron level and give blood as often as necessary. "Haemochromatosis is like a speed bump on life's highway. It may have slowed me up for a little while but once treated I am off and running again" Senator Sterle said.

Haemochromatosis Australia recommends that if you have been feeling unusually tired with aching joints over a long period of time, discuss your symptoms with a GP and to ask about haemochromatosis. People with a family history of haemochromatosis should also ask to be tested.

"Some people are pumping more iron than they need" said Ben Marris, Haemochromatosis Australia President.



"Most people know that not having enough iron in your blood makes you feel weak. That's anemia. But having too much iron can also be a problem.

"Haemochromatosis is a scary-sounding long word. It means inherited iron overload disorder. Although it is very common and can be found by simple blood tests, it's often overlooked. Fortunately it is easily treated if diagnosed early." About one in every 200 Australians have the genes for haemochromatosis. They have an increased risk of absorbing too much iron from their food

"Haemochromatosis is difficult to say but easy to find and simple to treat. If it is diagnosed early it should be no impediment to a long and healthy life." Mr Marris said.

Haemochromatosis Australia is a non-profit advocacy and support group. More information can be found on the web site at [ha.org.au](http://ha.org.au) or by calling the information line **1300 019 028**.

August 10 to 16 is Haemochromatosis Awareness Week.

ENDS

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**Haemochromatosis Information:**

Haemochromatosis, or inherited iron overload disorder, is the most common genetic disorder in Australia. It causes the body to absorb excess iron which builds up in the organs and joints over many years and eventually becomes toxic.

Early symptoms include joint pains, fatigue, weakness and sexual dysfunction.

If untreated it can lead to serious and potentially fatal symptoms including diabetes, liver cancer and cirrhosis, heart failure and osteoarthritis.



Despite being so common (one in 200 have the genetic pre-disposition) it is not well known and is frequently overlooked. Often only the individual symptoms are treated and the underlying cause is not recognised.

Tests for the condition are simple and cheap.

If people are diagnosed early and treated then haemochromatosis is no barrier to a normal healthy life.

Treatment is simple, drug free and uncontroversial. Regular venesection, like giving blood at a blood bank, unloads iron. Often this can be done at the Red Cross Blood Service and the blood is useful.

**Haemochromatosis Australia:**

Haemochromatosis Australia is the not-for-profit support, health promotion and advocacy group for people with haemochromatosis and their families.

Approximately 1400 members across Australia.

INFO LINE: 1300 019 028

Website: [www.ha.org.au](http://www.ha.org.au) .