



## Breaking the pain barrier

One in five people suffer chronic pain — pain that’s experienced on a daily basis in excess of three to six months — and one in ten will report that pain is interfering with their lives, which means it might be affecting their ability to work. **Advanced Safety** reports.

Australian workers struggling to manage chronic pain need to regain control over their lives. The good news is they can gain control with community help.

“Managing that pain is really important and retaining those workers is critical because as a nation, we need those numbers in our work force,” Coralie Wales, president of the Chronic Pain Association of Australia, said.

“We know that people stop going to work because of pain and are less effective at work.”

Research shows that Australia loses \$5 billion every year in reduced productivity due to chronic pain in workers — a big number given the ageing workforce and skills shortage. People aged 35–55 years can have two or more chronic conditions. When they suffer an injury, the problem becomes complex. Research also shows that the chemistry of stress can make the

experience of pain from an injury worse, paving the way for the likelihood of chronic pain.

Ms Wales said there was a need to improve the level of control workers with chronic pain have over their lives.

“That means bringing them into the process and not excluding them from the process of planning in rehabilitation,” she said.

“We can produce a circle around injured workers, which makes them the leader, rather than the follower... and when we do that, it really works, reducing a lot of the game playing that goes on in rehabilitation.”

Ms Wales said research showed the community can play a key role in workers getting back to a position of trusting after possibly years of feeling they haven’t had control because they haven’t trusted what has been going on in their lives in trying to manage pain. ■

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