

September 13, 2019

To the House of Representatives Committee,

I am writing with regards to the inquiry into anaphylaxis in Australia. I note that much of the work and inquiry into impacts is centred on children. I would like to draw the committee's attention to the fact that nut allergies, in particular, are lifelong and thus the impacts are severe, life altering and life threatening forever.

I would like to raise the following points. I note I am allergic to peanuts, pine nuts, hazelnuts, almonds, pistachios and cashews. I am allergic to peanut proteins in the air. I have suffered multiple anaphylactic episodes and can attest to using adrenalin and suffering an anaphylactic episode as feeling the equivalent of being run over by something incredibly heavy and not being able to get up or feel well for days sometimes a week. I am generally fearful of going out in public places.

I have suffered multiple and repeated episodes in my workplace resulting in allergy asthma – not just anaphylaxis. I have eaten food that I was told had no nuts but did. I cannot eat any food that contains the package warning may contain traces of nuts. I have suffered an asthma attack from eating lentils that were packaged in a facility that prepared nuts (the person who prepared them did not check the packaging).

My points I would like to raise include:

- a) There continues to be a lack of safety for sufferers when eating out. (I rarely eat out as I do not trust systems are in place the genuinely ensure my nut allergy is taken a) seriously or b) in a manner that is safe to ensure I will not be impacted. Improved labelling is essential and hospitality training vital.
- b) Hospitals and emergency centres should be nut free environments because for any person with a nut allergy presenting to any of these locations the potential for recontamination (and in my case my allergy is airborne – i.e triggered by proteins in the air) In addition if a person like myself with a severe nut allergy were to be hospitalised that person would need a single room to ensure that they do not have another patient in the room who might cause an allergic reaction by eating nut products. My mother is currently being treated for cancer and the hospital has been largely totally unhelpful in assisting us with single rooms to ensure I can even visit her and whilst I understand the issue of room shortages, it raised for me the issue that if I was the patient would my request be met and if not what level of concern would I have for my wellbeing. Additionally I have been in hospital emergency wards where I have suffered an asthma attack because staff were eating nuts as they wandered around the emergency ward.
- c) The lack of awareness that the allergy can be triggered by proteins in the air results in widespread discrimination and loss of opportunity in life
- d) Workplaces are not adequately addressing this life-threatening disability. For someone like myself who is allergic to the proteins in the air being seated near a kitchen, where foods like peanut butter are used and satays are reheated – can be life-threatening/allergic reaction inducing – in my case it causes an asthma attack. Repeated exposure increases the severity of the attack and potential for hospitalisation/anaphylaxis. Additionally suffering an allergic reaction impacts sick days or if you are a casual employee complete loss of pay. In my case

my allergy caused me to have to reduce the number of hours I was working because of the constant, sometimes daily exposure. I have lost significant income as a result impacting my personal economic situation.

- e) My capacity to seek employment and disclose my allergy and its workplace impacts is severely compromised.
- f) Life threatening allergies should be recognised as a disability
- g) Airlines should be legally obliged to provide a safe space for all persons to travel and nuts should be prohibited from sale on aircraft due to the contained space and lack of emergency access should there be a reaction – a person has a right to eat whatever they want but if eating that food could kill someone surely the life of the person takes precedence over eating a bag of nuts when there are so many other options.
- h) Universities, higher education and all other training facilities should be nut free environments. Due to the worsening of my condition I have had to undertake only online study which is severely limiting for social access and engagement
- i) A nut allergy for an adult like myself has been akin to leprosy. I have had people deliberately put nuts in front of me, disbelieve the allergy exists, in the workplace continue to eat nuts despite being told about the severity, informed the workplace but no formal management plan was ever put in place, I was also informed by management that no one could administer my epi-pen if I were to go into anaphylaxis and a wide range of other discriminatory and often just ill-informed responses to my condition. Additionally I have been called names by management in the past ... nut chick.
- j) I recognise that the management of my condition is my responsibility but I hope that community and workplaces would move towards affording those with such a life-altering allergy the same protections and understanding afforded other disabilities.

I note that the severe impacts for children are complex and psychologically damaging (i.e being scared of dying because of others actions) but it is no less relevant for an adult suffering from the same condition.

A campaign to raise awareness and to ensure that those with severe anaphylaxis can participate in life is essential additionally legal measures need to protect people with such conditions and needs from discrimination and provide safe work and education spaces.

Thank you for your consideration of my experience and for the opportunity you are providing for this serious health condition to be reviewed and assessed.

Kind Regards