

## Submission to Senate Inquiry into Mental Health

Submitted by Origins Inc. Supporting People Separated by  
Adoption Queensland Branch.

For the Attention of the senate Committee

In Queensland around 50,000 children mostly newborns were adopted since the early 1920's.

Most of these children were adopted under the 1964 Queensland adoption legislation that changed the birth certificates of the adopted person and locked up their true identity under very stringent secrecy provisions.

The young mothers were mostly not given access to their babies in the hospital and were coerced into signing consent forms, without any legal advice, by workers from the Dept. of Child Welfare. These mothers were then discharged from the hospital and told to go and forget that they ever had the child. This callous treatment has contributed to grave mental health issues in these mothers in the following years, sometimes up to fifty years on.

Many have been found to suffer secondary infertility never having the joy of another child. Some have suffered years of depression and anxiety.

In my work as coordinator for the support group for mothers in Queensland I have noted mothers who need professional help to treat their mental health issues and have tried to refer them on to both psychologists and psychiatrists, only to have them return without satisfaction with their treatment. Their needs to be more education about adoption loss and grief in the medical fraternity and to this end, last year Origins Qld held a conference at The Park Centre for Mental Health. This was attended by a number of professionals and the feedback from this conference has proven to us that more needs to be done to address this need in the adoption community.

Many of these mothers have been emotionally paralysed to the extent that they can not work and some have had many admissions to Mental Health facilities or have self medicated on illegal substances.

Adoptees presenting at our office or on the phone have also suffered with various mental health issues such as depression anxiety and alcoholism or drug abuse.

Many adoptees have had difficulty with relationships because and commitment out of a perception they have of not being good enough for their mothers to keep them.

I have had members who refuse to have a child themselves until they find their identity. In some cases this has caused a marriage breakdown.

Recently an adoptee who gave birth to her first child sought help for her overwhelming feelings about the birth of the first person she had seen who was related to her and a social worker at the hospital told her it was nothing to do with her adoption.

She came to us and was given support by other adoptees and reading material and was then able to work through her issues and mother her child. This help should be available from the staff at social work dept at the hospital.

There are a fair number of adoptees in the correctional institutions far above what may be expected if one takes into consideration that only about 3% of the population is adopted and the number in prison has been estimated to be in the vicinity of 20% [there is some indication that it is actually much higher but more research needs to be done on this subject]

The number of adoptees who contemplate or succeed in taking their own life is also, anecdotally, very high.[Some research on this subject is currently being undertaken by James Cook University in Central Queensland]

The mental health of Mothers who lost their children in Queensland to past adoption practices has been neglected as has the mental health of their adopted out children.

The Queensland Government has not provided Post Adoption services and the people affected have to rely on volunteer organizations, such as ours, to receive help with the many issues they have because of the past practices of the Government.

Origins Qld receives no funding from the Queensland Government and relies on donations and membership for day to day running costs. We have been provided with an office by the Mental Health Association of Queensland at their premises at Wacol and are very grateful for this help but it is not a central location and many of our members can not access us personally.

In Queensland adoption legislation there is a provision for adopted persons and natural mothers to place objections to information being released [section 39 of the 1991 amendments].

This is the only state to have such draconian legislation and it has caused natural mothers and adoptees facing this objection when applying for their information about their birth and the birth of their child to suffer more grief. This has resulted in some very sad outcomes such as major depression and in some cases suicide.

***Recommendations we would like considered.....***

We ask that a recommendation be made that the State Government accepts responsibility and accountability for providing Post Adoption Support Services [not just a provision of information service as they do currently].

The Health Department educate their officers and staff on mental health issues associated with adoption outcomes.

Fund research in the area of correctional institutions and the over representation of persons affected by adoption and removal incarcerated in Queensland.

That the Department of Child Safety Qld. produce reference and education material on the mental health issues in adoption for distribution to women considering adoption for their children and to prospective adoptive parents.

That the Government consider amending the legislation to allow all people affected by adoption to have access to their personal information and their original birth certificates in line with all other Australians.

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