

World-first report exposes the hidden \$17.5 billion cost of birth injuries and trauma

- New report reveals birth injuries and ongoing conditions cost Australia an estimated \$17.5 billion in one year alone.
- An estimated 1.1 million Women+ in Australia are living with birth injuries, many of which remain under-recognised, under-treated and under-reported.
- Birth Trauma Australia is calling for a National Best-Practice Model for Perinatal Care, 12 months of funded postnatal care and expanded Medicare support to improve access to treatment and recovery.

13 JULY 2026 – A new global-first report, *The Cost of Birth Trauma in Australia*, reveals birth injuries and ongoing conditions following childbirth cost Australian Women+, families and the economy an estimated \$17.5 billion in FY2023–24.

Released to coincide with Birth Trauma Awareness Week, the report – commissioned by Birth Trauma Australia and prepared by Nous Group – is the first national economic analysis of its kind in the world to comprehensively quantify the scale of the economic burden and strengthen the evidence base for investment in prevention, treatment and postnatal care reform.

Amy Dawes, CEO and Co-Founder of Birth Trauma Australia says, “Every year, tens of thousands of women experience physical injuries as a result of birth, including from what are considered uncomplicated vaginal births. From perineal tears and pelvic floor trauma to nerve damage, some injuries are identified at the time of birth, but many more go unrecognised. These are not minor complications. For many women, they are life-changing conditions that affect their physical and mental health, relationships, work, and family for years. Yet despite this, too many women still struggle to access the care they need and deserve.”

The hidden economic burden

The analysis found the impacts of birth injuries and ongoing conditions are felt across the health system, workforce, households and broader community. In FY2023–24, these costs included:

- **\$8.8 billion in lost labour market costs**, as women+ delay returning to work, reduce their hours or leave the workforce due to ongoing symptoms or disability.
- **\$6.5 billion in wellbeing and burden of disease impacts**, reflecting lasting physical, mental health and social consequences.
- **\$1.4 billion in health system costs**, driven by ongoing treatment, hospital care and specialist support.
- **\$792 million in household financial costs**, driven by out-of-pocket healthcare expenses, reduced household income and increased reliance on informal care.

“We commissioned this report because we knew the impact was significant, but until now no one had measured its true cost. The findings are staggering. Behind every statistic is a woman+, a family and lives changed. These figures represent the physical, emotional and financial toll that too many have carried in silence for far too long,” Amy Dawes added.

An estimated 1.1 million Australian women+ were living with birth injuries and ongoing conditions following childbirth in FY23–24. These can include severe perineal tears, pelvic floor dysfunction and nerve damage, chronic pain, incontinence, sexual dysfunction and psychological trauma. For many, these are not short-term complications but lifelong conditions that remain under-recognised and under-treated and often require ongoing care through hospital services, specialists, medications, allied health and community-based support.

Sam Knight, Registered Midwife, Nurse and Birth Trauma Australia advocate, says, “As both a nurse and someone living with birth injuries and ongoing conditions, I’ve seen how often these conditions are dismissed as ‘just part of having a baby’. They can have lifelong consequences; I had to change my career path because of mine.

“The numbers in this report reflect real people whose lives have been changed by birth injuries. Behind every statistic is someone navigating ongoing pain, recovery and the ripple effects these conditions can have on their family, work and future.”

Importantly, the report's estimates are considered conservative. Australia has no single national dataset capturing the full spectrum of birth injuries or their long-term impacts. Many conditions remain undiagnosed, under-reported, or inconsistently recorded in part because women+ often don't seek support until well beyond the initial postpartum period, by which point the connection to birth is frequently overlooked or lost entirely.

As a result, the true economic and societal cost is likely to be significantly higher than estimated. These evidence gaps reflect a broader issue: for too long, the experiences of women+ living with birth injuries have gone unseen, unmeasured and, often at a significant financial and personal toll to families.

A blueprint for action

By putting evidence behind the experiences of women+ living with birth injuries, the report aims to be a catalyst for change, calling for stronger evidence, greater awareness, and a renewed focus on preventing birth injuries when possible.

In practice, that means giving women+ clearer information about the risk of birth injury, recognising symptoms earlier, and ensuring more timely access to treatment, care and recovery support. Dedicated research is also needed, particularly studies that explore lifetime or longitudinal effects extending beyond the immediate postnatal period.

Building on the report's findings, Birth Trauma Australia is calling for a coordinated national response to birth injuries through a National Best-Practice Model for Evidence-based, Consumer-led Perinatal Care. Key priorities include:

- Extending the funded postnatal care period from 6–8 weeks to 12 months postpartum to better support recovery.
- Expanding access to relevant Medicare-funded postnatal services, support and clinical programs, throughout the first 12 months postpartum, including strengthening existing MBS items to deliver more consistent care and improve data collection.
- Formally recognising pelvic floor dysfunction as a chronic condition to improve access to earlier diagnosis, treatment and ongoing care.

Together, these reforms have the potential to improve outcomes for women+, reduce lifelong impacts of birth injuries and ongoing conditions and ease the significant burden on families, the health system and the Australian economy.

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ABOUT THE REPORT

The Cost of Birth Trauma in Australia was commissioned by Birth Trauma Australia and prepared by Nous Group. It is the first national economic analysis of its kind to quantify the impact of birth injuries and ongoing conditions in Australia, estimating the costs across the health system, workforce, households and broader wellbeing. The report also outlines recommendations to strengthen prevention, improve recognition and access to care, and support better long-term outcomes for women+ and their families.

The report is being released during Birth Trauma Awareness Week, an annual campaign led by Birth Trauma Australia to raise awareness of the lasting impacts of birth trauma and improve understanding, recognition and support.

ABOUT BIRTH TRAUMA

Birth trauma is a woman's or person's experience of interactions and/or events related to childbirth that cause overwhelming distressing emotions and reactions, leading to short and/or long-term negative impacts on a woman's health and wellbeing. Birth-related trauma can be physical, psychological, or a combination of both. Birth-related trauma impacts mothers, birthing parents, fathers, non-birthing parents and healthcare providers.

ABOUT BIRTH TRAUMA AUSTRALIA

Birth Trauma Australia (BTA) is Australia's peak charity dedicated to the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of birth-related trauma. Established in 2016, BTA supports people affected by birth trauma through peer support, advocacy, education, and collaboration with healthcare professionals. We also work to improve maternity care by contributing to health policy, translating research into practice, and delivering nationally accredited professional development for clinicians through our ThinkNatal™ eLearning platform. Our mission is to build a future where every birth is safe, and every person is supported in healing. For more information, visit www.birthtrauma.org.au