

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

11 AUGUST 2015

EVERY WEEK IN AUSTRALIA, *ONE* WOMAN IS KILLED THE RESULT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

EVERY WEEK IN AUSTRALIA, *THREE* WOMEN ARE HOSPITALISED WITH A BRAIN INJURY THE RESULT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS WEEK 2015 BEGINS MONDAY 17TH AUGUST

Having just finished university, 25 year-old Rebecca Sciroli had her sights set on becoming an arts therapist. Until her stepfather brutally bashed her with a hammer, resulting in multiple skull fractures and a severe brain injury. "I just remember the blows from the hammer raining down on my head, and screaming 'why, why, why are you doing this to me?'" she recalls. "All he said was 'it's the only way'". Years on from the attack, Rebecca still lives in the constant pain of spasticity caused by paralysis on her right side. And due to the brain injury's effects on her thinking, planning and organisation, "I'm constantly challenged by normal, everyday situations - just going anywhere, getting to places on time."

"Every year in Australia, around 150 women are hospitalised with a brain injury due to an assault by their partner," says Nick Rushworth Executive Officer of the peak disability advocacy organisation, Brain Injury Australia. "Given 1 in every 6 women report having been subjected to family violence since the age of 15, hospitalisations are bound to be the tip of an iceberg." International evidence indicates over 90 percent of women using family violence refuges have sustained head injuries, with nearly 1 in 10 saying they had been hit in the head over 20 times in the past year.

Based at St. Vincent's Hospital on the border of Sydney's Kings Cross, neurosurgeon Dr. Richard Parkinson knows first-hand the toll violence takes on the brain. And for the last 8 years, he's been treating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from remote areas in an outpatient clinic he established at Royal Darwin Hospital. "The rates of brain injury due to assault among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are around 70 times that of other women," he says. "In some communities, this kind of violence is just rife, it's rampant."

Toni Wright, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman, sustained a severe brain injury during a four-hour siege at her home. "I'm told my son-in-law punched, kicked and stomped on my head while holding my grandson, who has autism, hostage at knifepoint," she says. Facing the second anniversary of the assault during Brain Injury Awareness Week, Toni grieves the loss of her independence. "I was attacked because I was trying to *protect* my daughter. Now, my daughter is *my* carer. This kind of violence is killing our communities. It's got to stop."

To arrange interviews, or for further information, please contact Nick Rushworth Executive Officer Brain Injury Australia on (0417) 373 622