

ELECTROSHOCK IS TORTURE BUT IS LEGAL FOR ALL AGES IN NSW

HELP BAN ELECTROSHOCK IN NSW

Most people think that electroshock treatment—the application of hundreds of volts of electricity sent through the brain—is banned in NSW, but that is not the case. **Not only can it be given to NSW children, elderly and pregnant women but it can be given up to four times in one session!** It can also be given against a person's wishes, despite a 2013 report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment that defined procedures such as electroshock without the consent of the patient as a form of torture.

In 2021, the World Health Organisation said that involuntary electroshock is one of the coercive psychiatric practices which needs to be eliminated.

Electroshock (ECT): Induces a grand mal seizure (convulsion) that can cause memory loss—sometimes permanent—and other serious adverse effects, including brain damage. In other words ECT inflicts harm. Yet the *NSW Mental Health Act* allows this barbarity, despite provision for a \$5,500 criminal fine or six month imprisonment or both for ill-treating or wounding a patient. Arguably, this happens every time ECT is administered. Meanwhile, the *NSW Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* has a \$44,000 fine or 1 year imprisonment or both if a person commits an act of cruelty on an animal.



So unwanted is ECT that one Australian woman forced to undergo electroshock said she had security guards wheel her down to the treatment room, holding her down so she didn't escape. "I felt like I was being wheeled down to the gas chamber," she said. She would even stash food to eat to avoid the general anaesthetic and when staff found her food, she resorted to eating grass to avoid the electroshock.

History of Electroshock: Electroshock was developed in 1938 out of a Rome slaughterhouse, where pigs were electroshocked to make it easier to slit their throats in order to kill them. Psychiatrist, Ugo Cerletti, had been experimenting with electric shock on dogs where half of the animals died from cardiac arrest. After seeing the pigs being shocked, he decided to use this on people.

Adverse effects from ECT also include: Cardiovascular complications; including irregular heartbeat; heart attack; stroke; cognition and memory impairment (sometimes permanent); dental or oral trauma and physical trauma; manic symptoms; prolonged seizures; worsening of psychiatric symptoms; cardiac arrest and death. Manufacturers of an ECT machine used in NSW state other serious adverse events have occurred including coma and homicidality.

⚡ Any claim that ECT does not cause brain damage ignores basic electrical science as when electricity is sent through the brain, it is converted into heat, increasing the temperature. Cells can suffer dysfunction, temporary injury, permanent damage or even cell death, according to Dr. Ken Castleman, Ph.D., a biomedical engineer who has provided legal testimony in ECT device litigation.

⚡ A 2017 published review of more than 90 ECT studies since 2009 showed they remain "methodologically flawed" and "Given the well-documented high risk of persistent memory dysfunction, the cost-benefit analysis for ECT remains so poor that its use cannot be scientifically, or ethically, justified." The review also found that there is still no evidence that ECT is more effective than placebo for depression or suicide prevention.

Number of Electroshocks Given in NSW: In 2020/21, psychiatrists in NSW shocked and tortured the brains of vulnerable children and adults a staggering 8,180 times. In 2018, there were 156 electroshocks given to teens aged 15-19 years old. But the figure could be much higher. NSW's Policy Directive for ECT instructs that electroshock can be given up to four times during the same session. In contrast, Medicare in the U.S. refuses coverage of "multiple ECT" because studies have demonstrated there is an increased risk of side effects with multiple seizures.

Electroshock Bans in Australia: In 2005, The World Health Organisation stated, “There are no indications for the use of ECT on minors, and hence this should be prohibited through legislation.” WA bans electroshock on children under the age of 14 and the ACT ban its use for under 12 year olds. Electroshock must be banned for all ages including for use on children, pregnant women and the elderly.

ECT is not a cure: There is a high failure (relapse) rate within six months of receiving ECT, requiring more ECT that creates yet more damage. Called “maintenance ECT,” antidepressants and/or other psychotropic drugs continue to be administered—the very drugs said to have failed, “requiring” the ECT.

Electroshock Device: When the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved the current ECT devices for use in Australia in 2004 and 2015, no medical studies proving safety and efficacy were required, provided or relied upon to make this decision. Yet, on October 19, 2018, following a lawsuit it settled, Somatics LLC, the manufacturer of the Thymatron ECT device, which is used in NSW, issued a warning of “permanent brain damage” in its new risk disclosures.



Conflicts of Interest: The *NSW Mental Health Act* states that psychiatrists administering ECT to voluntary patients—but not to involuntary ones—must disclose financial relationships with the psychiatric facility (which does nothing to prevent imminent harm to the patient.) Quite apart from the fact that they shouldn’t be administering electroshock at all, there’s no requirement to disclose any ties to manufacturers of ECT devices or to research agencies they may be profiting from. Psychiatrist Prof. Colleen Loo works at the Black Dog Institute in NSW, performs ECT, and is the Medical Director of ECT at Wesley Hospital in Kogarah. She also helped write the 2019 Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrist’s ECT Guidelines. As recently as 2018, Prof. Loo has received lecture fees from MECTA, the U.S. manufacturer of another ECT device—also used in NSW.

Psychiatrists Do Not Know how Electroshock “Works:” Psychiatrists admit they still do not know how ECT “works.” As Victoria’s former Deputy Chief Psychiatrist Professor Kuruvilla George, wrote: “How does ECT work? This is the million dollar question and the first thing to state is that no one is certain.” Imagine a heart surgeon claiming he doesn’t know how the heart works but has dozens of theories—and no scientific fact—about why a coronary bypass operation should be performed. He would be sued for malpractice!

Log onto cchr.org.au to see references for above and to learn more about electroshock

TAKE ACTION NOW TO HELP BAN ELECTROSHOCK

Write, phone, visit or email your local Member of Parliament: Express your concerns about electroshock and ask them to amend the *NSW Mental Health Act* to ban electroshock for all ages with criminal fines and prison terms in violation of the ban. parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/pages/all-members.aspx

Share this Fact Sheet with others: It is also available at: cchr.org.au Contact CCHR for free bulk copies to distribute and to obtain and sign a parliamentary petition to ban ECT.

Report side effects to Therapeutic Goods Administration: Anyone can report adverse effects related to medical devices and psychiatric drugs. This can be done by logging onto: tga.gov.au/reporting-problems

Report psychiatric abuse: If you or a family member has been harmed by electroshock, please contact CCHR. All information kept in confidence.

The *NSW Mental Health Act* can be found at: www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/2007/8/whole



Contact:

CCHR Australian National Office

02 9964 9844 • national@cchr.org.au • www.cchr.org.au

CCHR was co-founded in 1969 by the Church of Scientology and the late Professor of Psychiatry, Dr. Thomas Szasz, to investigate and expose psychiatric violations of human rights.