The NSW Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program (BIRP)

The NSW Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program provides a continuum of specialist clinical services for children, young people and adults of working age with a hospital admission for a significant traumatic acquired brain injury (TBI).

Specialised TBI rehabilitation is characterised by early intervention aimed to maximise recovery following trauma and effectively manage the distinctly different challenges that often confront people with TBI and their families during the short and longer term stages of recovery, rehabilitation and social integration.

Research shows that people with TBI who receive care in specialist services achieve more positive outcomes over the short and long-term, with correspondingly lower levels of morbidity.

A number of factors necessitate this specialised approach.

- The disability associated with brain injury is profound, multi-faceted and unique to each individual.
- The consequences of brain injury extend beyond the purely physical, which themselves can be very serious, to affect thinking and social skills needed for relationships, independent living, playing, learning, working and overall quality of life.
- People 15-34 years of age incur most TBI and will generally live as long as the general population. For those with severe long-term disability there will be lifelong care and support needs and social participation consequences.
- The mechanism of the injury itself is a key factor in what makes rehabilitation different for people with TBI from other neurological brain injury. Depending on the type and velocity of the forces affecting the brain, different areas throughout the whole brain are affected. This adds to the complexity of maximising recovery and need to implement rehabilitation programs that expand the physical/functional rehabilitation focus to include the cognitive, behaviour and psychosocial aspects of the person, their family and community.

Clients and families benefit from working collaboratively with BIRP staff to negotiate unfamiliar service systems to achieve their rehabilitation goals for everyday living. BIRP teams are able to assist in engaging with government and non-government agencies to access needed services, meet reporting requirements for insurers or employers, submit requests for funds, rehabilitation and service approvals.

Referral to BIRP teams

Metropolitan BIRPs are usually the first point of contact for Trauma Hospitals as a continuum of recovery and client centred planning following hospital admission. Decisions are made collaboratively to determine the need for inpatient, transitional or community based rehabilitation. At this point, most will be admitted to a metropolitan BIRP, however, depending on the types of programs being delivered and client/family rehabilitation and care needs, some will be referred directly to their local rural BIRP or later transition to a BIRP closer to where they live.

To manage changing needs and goals over time, the client and/or their family can be referred to their local BIRP community team for review at any time post severe TBI. Some paediatric clients will transition to adult BIRP services.

See Table for contact details.