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## Child shock therapy

Article from: Sunday Herald Sun

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Eleni Hale

January 25, 2009 12:00am

### CHILDREN younger than four who are considered mentally disturbed are being treated with controversial electric shock treatment.

Medicare figures show the use of Electroconvulsive Therapy has tripled in Victoria in the private health sector alone in six years.

A VicHealth report confirms more than 18,000 treatments were conducted in Victoria in 2007-2008.

Federal Government statistics show the use of ECT - an electric shock delivered straight to the brain - in the state's private health system increased from 1944 treatments in 2001-2002 to 6009 in 2007-2008.

About 12,000 treatments were performed in the public health system last financial year.

Medicare statistics record 203 ECT treatments on children younger than 14 - including 55 aged four and younger.

Two of the under-4s were in Victoria.

Last financial year, 6197 ECT treatments were given to Victorians against their will.

This news comes as the Western Australian Government moves to ban ECT procedures for children under 12.

The Victorian Government would not say if it would follow.

The figures have shocked some experts.

Prof Pat McGorry, chair of the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, said ECT treatment for children whose brains were still forming was worrying.

"That is of great concern, a very worrying trend and we need to know why," he said.

"Why has its use increased at that rate? I am shocked and amazed that children that young are being treated this way."

Though doctors are still mystified as to how it works, ECT is used to treat mental disorders such as manic depression and psychosis.

The figures show nearly three times as many women had shock treatment compared with men.

Side effects include memory loss, seizures and headaches.

Modern treatment involves anaesthetic before each ECT treatment, which occur at intervals during a few weeks.

Increasing numbers of patients who had been forced into ECT treatment were contacting the Mental Health Legal Centre claiming they were tortured, Vivienne Topp, a lawyer and policy adviser said.

Bioethicist Assoc Prof Nicholas Tonti-Filippini supported ECT on children, saying some toddlers were "disturbed".

Psychiatrist Dr Paul Skerrett, of the Australian Medical Association, said ECT sent the patient into an "epileptic" type fit, which helped rewire the brain.

"It is one of the most effective and safe treatments, though I would not be applauding its use in children. These figures are very high," he said.

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