



PRESS RELEASE

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### **Traumatic Brain Injury press conference attracts more than 50 survivors, family members and professionals**

Tallahassee, FL— More than 50 people gathered at the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Awareness Press Conference in the Florida Capitol Building on Tuesday. Survivors, family members, professionals and legislators came together to raise awareness about the condition and its impact on the community.

“As a parent of a teenaged TBI survivor, we wish to inform families of what precautions to take with their children, to speak to their children about risky behaviors and how critical it is to protect your brain from injury whether it’s an impact or chemical abuse,” said Erick Collazo, a caregiver and parent of a TBI survivor, when asked about why raising awareness about TBI is important.

Speakers at the event shared their experiences and stories and spoke about what services and resources are needed to help. They also addressed why raising awareness of TBI is important and their hopes for the future of TBI in Florida.

Thom DeLilla, the Bureau Chief of the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program within the Division of Emergency Medical Operations of the Florida Department of Health, sustained traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries during a diving accident 36 years ago.

“The general public does not recognize or understand the magnitude of the issue, including the incidence, causes and impact of traumatic brain injury,” he said. “More needs to be done to educate our communities about traumatic brain injuries, how these injuries can be prevented, what actions to take when a head injury occurs and what programs and services are available to help.”

Traumatic brain injury is a growing public health problem, and its impact is significant on survivors, family members and society as a whole. In 2005, 93,000 TBIs occurred in Florida, leading to more than 71,000 emergency department visits and nearly 18,000 hospitalizations. Falls were the leading cause of injury. More than 8,200 Floridians sustain long-term disabilities as a result of their TBI each year. These estimates do not include the impact of TBI on Florida’s returning service men and women, for whom brain injury has been labeled the “signature wound.”

“We’re only beginning to understand the impact of blast-related TBIs sustained during military

service,” said Jim Edwards, lieutenant colonel of the U.S. Army Reserve and Nurse Manager of Brooks Rehabilitation Hospital’s Brain Injury and Pediatric Units. “As Florida has a very large number of veterans, only time will tell if we are prepared to deal with their issues.”

Other speakers at the conference included Dr. Jennifer Bencie, Director of the Florida Department of Health’s Division of Emergency Medical Operations; Lee Bradford Johnson, District Representative on behalf of Congressman F. Allen Boyd of Florida’s 2nd congressional district; Valerie Breen, executive director for the Brain Injury Association of Florida; and Frank L. Toral, president of the Brain Injury Association of Florida and author of “My Child Has a Brain Injury: What Do I Do Now?”

“As a legal advocate for brain injury survivors and their families, I have personally seen the devastating impact that even mild brain injuries have on a person’s ability to relate to their loved ones, carry on a conversation with family, maintain gainful employment and overall quality of life,” Toral said.

The press conference was the culmination of a three-year, federally funded partnership between the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program of the Florida Department of Health, the Brain Injury Association of Florida and WellFlorida Council, called Project ACTION.

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