

A photograph of a family walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk that winds through a forest. The father is on the right, wearing a dark sweater and pants, holding the hand of a young child in a dark jacket and striped hat. The mother is further ahead on the left, wearing a light-colored jacket and pants, holding the hand of another child in a light-colored jacket and hat. The forest is dense with trees and undergrowth, and the scene is bathed in a soft, golden light.

Life After a Brain Injury

A brain injury affects the entire family and those people around them. Whether it is good or bad, any experience can change our lives. Living with a brain injury takes a lot of adjustment. However, there are many things that you can do to help yourself and your family members.

There may be interruptions and changes in usual family roles, routines, and responsibilities. Take time to identify how your brain injury changed the roles in your family, the new responsibilities that have been added to your daily routine, and how these changes have affected your life.

Going Home

Planning for a return home should begin once your healthcare team has determined your short- and long-term needs.

Planning tips:

- Ask for planning assistance from your social worker or nurse.
- Contact the professionals, associations or agencies you will need depending on the services you require such as: home care and support services, respite care, insurance coverage, therapies (physiotherapy, occupational, and speech), transportation arrangements, making follow-up appointments, and educational assistance.
- Contact the Manitoba Brain Injury Association for a list of agencies that provide the above services.
- Basic equipment such as wheelchairs, grab bars, toilet and bath seats are provided to persons at no cost through the provincial government.
- Make a list of things that you will need upon discharge from the hospital.
- Maintain contact with professionals that are already involved in your care.

The process of rehabilitation continues at home. Having realistic goals and expectations is very important in the recovery process.

Home Care Services

The Manitoba Home Care Program is a community-based service that provides home support to any eligible Manitoban, regardless of age, who requires health services or help with daily living activities. Families or individuals may have the opportunity to manage their own home care services through family-managed or self-managed care options. For general information, visit: www.gov.mb.ca/health/homecare/guide.pdf.

Available Support Services

The following are support services available to assist people and their families:

Respite offers families short-term alternative care for adults living with disability.

Day service transportation may be provided through public or specialized services for people attending approved day services.

Crisis intervention ensures the immediate physical safety and well-being of people in crisis while long-term plans are developed.

Clinical services provide a range of behavioural and psychological supports, including clinical assessment, therapy, and consultation with community programs.



HOUSING

Survivors who are unable to return to the community or their family usually remain in the hospital until they are eligible to be placed in a personal care home or chronic care facility (nursing home). However, there is a long waiting list for these facilities. The Province of Manitoba determines the fees for these accommodations according to income. If you are receiving benefits from Employment and Income Assistance, these fees will be paid.

New programs for community-based housing with support services are always being developed. Check with your social worker or the Manitoba Brain Injury Association to find out what is available in your area.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing resources offer short-term or temporary residence for persons with disabilities learning to live independently in the community with limited, moderate or extensive support from home care attendants and/or equipment aids.

One resource is Ten Ten Sinclair Housing Inc., which is an apartment complex managed by staff who provide support, guidance, and information to help the tenants achieve their goals. The length of tenancy varies from three months to two years.

EMPLOYMENT

Returning to work after a brain injury is not easy. Sometimes returning to work is not an option. Other times, when somebody returns to the same position they are not successful because of the changes from the brain injury. Some have found returning to work on a part-time basis is the best answer. Survivors should give themselves lots of time and use the resources available to improve the chances of returning to work successfully.

Manitoba Family Services and Consumer Affairs' MarketAbilities program offers adults with disabilities a wide range of employment-focused services in the following areas:

- preparing for work
- finding a job
- keeping a job

Available Services

Vocational counselling: vocational counsellors work with people to explore their employment goals. To develop these goals, counsellors talk with participants about their interests, abilities and skills.

Vocational training: This may include specific job development and/or post-secondary or other adult education courses.

Support services: Offers support to overcome disability-related barriers to employment.

Direct employment services: Helps with job searching, resume preparation, establishment of contacts with job placement agencies, job referral, and on-the-job training.

To apply for MarketAbilities program, contact:

Society of Manitobans with Disabilities

825 Sherbrook Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba

204-975-3010

Toll-free: 1-866-282-8041

RELATIONSHIPS

There are three things that change in relationships after a brain injury:

- role reversal
- survivor's personality change
- less time for family members

Shifting roles change relationships between the survivor and family members. Spouses and children suddenly become caregivers. Being a caregiver is overwhelming and adapting to changes, personality changes included, is challenging.

Seeking out social support can help lessen stress and loneliness. A support group can help you to make connections with other people who have similar concerns and needs. Contact the Manitoba Brain Injury Association for support group services.

SEXUALITY

A brain injury can alter the expression of sexuality. Sex involves the expression of our male and female identities. It's affected by our attitudes and behaviour within the relationship. After a brain injury, you may find differences in the ability to *appropriately express* learned sexual behaviours. You may find differences in behaviours such as kissing, hugging, and touching.

A majority of people regard sexuality as a private matter so it may be difficult to talk about this topic. People who have suffered a brain injury may benefit from professional support and guidance to deal with sexual issues.



"Seeking out social support can help lessen stress and loneliness."



DRIVING AFTER BRAIN INJURY¹

Driving is the activity that requires the greatest use of all our multitasking abilities.

It requires our complete and total focus and concentration at the same time as requiring a sharp awareness of everything that is happening around us. It requires rapid decisions and quick physical reactions.

After a brain injury, many survivors should not be driving because their reflexes and decision-making are slow. There may also be issues related to light sensitivity and vision problems that can affect driving ability. These changes are not uncommon, but may be subtle and go unnoticed. More important, the brain is still in a very delicate condition and even a small accident may be dangerous for the survivor.

In Manitoba, if you have a medical condition that may affect your ability to drive, your doctor must report it to the Medical and Assessment Division of Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI). This is required by law as well as the medical professional code of ethics.

This report may result in the following:

- a request for further medical reports
- a request that the individual undergo driver's testing.
- a referral of the individual to the Driver Assessment and Management Program (DAMP) located at the Health Sciences Centre or to MPI's DriveABLE program
- restrictions placed on an individual's driver's license
- reclassification of the individual's license to a lower classification
- suspension of the individual's license **UNTIL FURTHER INFORMATION IS RECEIVED**

The suspension of a driver's license **is not** automatic following an acquired brain injury. The course of action depends upon each unique medical situation.

The process of re-earning a driver's license is as unique to each individual as the effects of his or her specific brain injury.

Driving is one of the things we take for granted until we lose the right to drive. After a brain injury, driving usually requires more concentration than before. When considering a return to driving discuss the issue with your physician and request a referral to the DriveABLE program (DAMP) for an assessment.

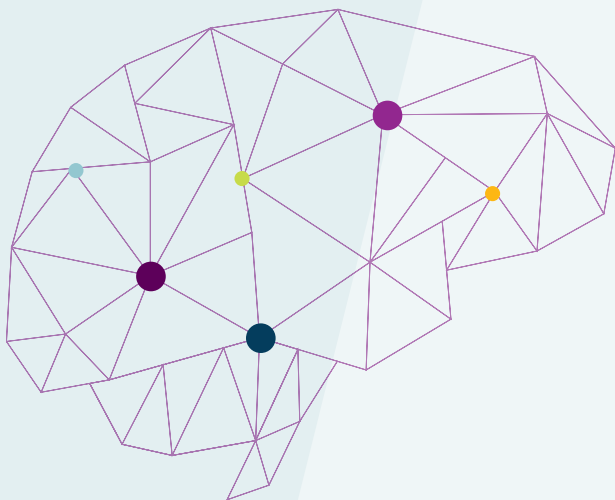
¹ Jim Sinclair, brain injury survivor.

ADVOCACY

The act of advocacy involves representing the needs of those who are unable to do so for themselves. After a brain injury, it is common for the loved ones of the survivor to negotiate on his or her behalf with the professionals involved such as health care workers, social services, insurance companies, and many others.

A guideline for effective advocacy is as follows:

- **Prepare:** Define the issue, gather information, identify supporters.
- **Plan:** Review the issue, identify preferred solutions, choose the route, delegate tasks.
- **Act:** Carryout tasks.
- **Evaluate:** Determine if action has resulted in progress.



FINANCIAL CONCERNS

It is normal to be concerned about the financial stability of your family and the implications this sudden change of events might have.

Insurance Coverage

The following are the most common sources of insurance coverage:

- Workers Compensation Board (WCB) for injuries occurring at work
- Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) for motor vehicle accidents
- Compensation for Victims of Crime Program through Manitoba Justice
- Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit, which provides a pension for those with a work history
- private disability insurance carried by the survivor's workplace
- private disability insurance plan carried by the survivor

Often health professionals must fill out insurance forms on the survivor's behalf. It can be helpful to consult a professional (lawyer or social worker) who has experience in the area of brain injury.

Social Assistance

Speak with a social worker at the hospital to see if employment income assistance might be available. If you were employed, you may be eligible for employment insurance, long-term disability, or the Canadian Pension Plan Disability Benefit program.

Handling money

Sometimes a brain injury survivor may not have the ability to make good decisions for themselves. If this is the case, the family can pursue the following:

Power of Attorney

- Power of attorney gives a person other than the survivor complete control over the survivor's property and finances. The survivor grants this power to someone they know to be responsible and who will look after his or her well-being such as parents or spouses.

Trustee

- A trusteeship order is when the court appoints a trustee to manage the survivor's finances and property. The disadvantage of this appointment is that it puts limits on the survivor's rights.

Case Manager

- A case manager is a professional who helps the survivor with financial or legal matters. Sometimes a community social worker or rehabilitation practitioner will act as a case manager.

Lawyers

- Lawyers are helpful in the following situations: arranging power of attorney, writing a will, setting up a trust fund, learning about insurance coverage and obligations.
- Call the Manitoba Brain Injury Association or Legal Aid Manitoba (see resources section) for names of recommended lawyers.

USE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Brain injury survivors should stay away from alcohol and illegal drugs. Those substances can further interfere with the brain's ability to function. When the brain is already injured, the effects of alcohol and illegal drugs become worse and limit recovery.

Talk to the members of your rehabilitation team about the use of alcohol and drugs. There are treatments programs to help those with a brain injury deal with substance use problems.



HELPING
SURVIVORS