

# Electroshock Child Victims Get Justice After 45 Years: CCHR Now Wants U.S. and Worldwide Reforms

*Survivors from NZ's Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital vindicated by recent official recognition that ECT forced on them as kids was "willful ill-treatment"*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- In a precedent-setting and long-awaited move, New Zealand police have officially acknowledged that children subjected to hundreds of volts of electricity, known as electroshock treatment (ECT), in the 1970s at the country's Lake Alice psychiatric hospital suffered willful ill-treatment, for which there should be accountability.[1] Although some of the psychiatrists and others involved in electroshocking the children are now deceased or unfit to be prosecuted because of their age and infirmity, Mike Ferris, the executive director of [Citizens Commission on Human Rights \(CCHR\)](#) in New Zealand, said that the [recognition after 45 years](#) that the children were punitively abused is a vindication for the victims and for any child or involuntary patient today being forced to undergo ECT. CCHR International confirms that hundreds of teens and children—some as young as 5—are still electroshocked in the U.S. each year in violation of United Nations protections against torture.



Shock treatment survivors from NZ's Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital in the 1970s were vindicated by a recent official recognition that electroshock forced on them as kids was "willful ill-treatment." This reinforces the need for a U.S. and worldwide ban on punitive ECT.

Ferris adds that the public declaration by police reinforces that cruel and damaging "treatments" can be held criminally accountable. The conclusion of the police investigation is "momentous. It vindicates everything that survivors had been saying," he said.[2]

Operation Lake Alice was an investigation into allegations of ill-treatment involving children and young people at the now closed Lake Alice in the 1970s. For decades, CCHR chapters in Australia

and the U.S. supported the call for effective action to be taken in NZ, seeing it also as a precedent for other countries. There were numerous allegations of abuse and torture, particularly the use of electroshock without anesthetic on children as punishment, including to their genitals, and sexual abuse by staff.[3]

Paul Zentveld, who was electroshocked at Lake Alice at age 14 welcomed the announcement. Assisted by CCHR, he took the matter to the UN Committee Against Torture and two years ago, the UN upheld his complaint finding that the state had not conducted a thorough investigation and was in breach of the UN's Convention Against Torture.[4]

The state responded with a June 2021 royal commission inquiry held into the torture at Lake Alice and egregious failure of government agencies, police and psychiatric bodies to both stop the abuse. CCHR worked with many victims filing complaints in 1976.

Speaking to the commission, expert witness Dr. Barry Parsonson likened the alleged practices to those used by "state organs of terror, namely the Gestapo is a good example."

The abuses were never addressed in the 70s because the chief psychiatrist falsely told police at the time that the children were "feral and psychotic" and needed his shock "therapy." [5] Other psychiatrists supported him, including the director of a prominent mental health facility who told authorities the patients were "hopeless and beyond control" and "would readily 'gang up' against authority." [6] The same psychiatrist asserted that psychiatry had entered "an era which has seen a new scientific and sympathetic approach to the whole problem of mental health." [7]

However, Malcolm Burgess, a detective superintendent opined: "I think that most people would agree that it was completely unacceptable to administer electric shocks to children as a means of modifying behavior." A retired High Court Judge Sir Rodney Gallen described what happened at Lake Alice as "outrageous in the extreme."

Jan Eastgate, president of CCHR International, said the NZ case is a lesson from which we must learn, factoring in what's happening in the U.S, where thousands of adults and hundreds of children are given electroshock involuntarily every year. In one state, children and adults are subjected to painful skin electric shocks to modify their behavior. Since 1976, CCHR has fought for U.S. legislative protections, which includes four states that have banned the use of ECT on minors.

Other reforms include:

- In Australia, a lethal psychiatric practice involving coma-producing psychotropic drugs and electroshock, known as deep sleep treatment (DST), was banned in 1983. Administering DST constitutes a criminal offense, with potential jail for violations.
- Justice John Slattery, overseeing a New South Wales royal commission inquiry into DST

determined that ECT without a patients' consent, or after obtaining consent by use of fraud and deceit, commits, "a trespass to the person" and is "responsible for an assault on them." [8]

- Consequently, at least 30 DST victims received \$1.1 million in compensation through the NSW Victims [of crime] Compensation Tribunal, acknowledging that they were criminally assaulted. [9]

- In 2014, West Australia prohibited the use of ECT on children younger than fourteen, with a penalty of two years imprisonment if ECT is administered. [10]

- Worldwide, CCHR has successfully brought to fruition about 32 laws, including more than 20 in the U.S., that makes therapists' sexual involvement with their patients a criminal offense.

CCHR, responsible for more than [195 laws worldwide protecting patients](#), will continue its efforts until all patients in the mental health system have equal rights and it is legally recognized that electroshocking patients should be prohibited.

[1] Aaron Smale, "Criminal charges filed against former Lake Alice staff member," Stuff (NZ), 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/127221615/criminal-charges-filed-against-former-lake-alice-staff-member>

[2] Rachel Sadler, "Lake Alice: 89yo former staff member charged with willful ill treatment after police investigation," Newshub, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2021/12/lake-alice-89yo-charged-with-wilful-ill-treatment-following-police-investigation.html>

[3] Op. cit., Aaron Smale, Stuff (NZ), 8 Dec. 2021

[4] Op. cit., Aaron Smale, Stuff (NZ), 8 Dec. 2021

[5] Jan Eastgate, "CCHR's Work Acknowledged In NZ Inquiry Into Lake Alice Psychiatric Child Torture As "An Extraordinary Effort," Supporting Survivors For 45 Years," CCHR International, 1 July 2021, <https://www.cchrint.org/2021/07/01/cchrs-work-acknowledged-nz-inquiry-lake-alice-psychiatric-child-torture/>, citing: "Psychiatrist under scrutiny again," The Age, 18 April 2004, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/psychiatrist-under-scrutiny-again-20040418-gdxp4k.html>

[6] Op. cit., David Williams, Newsroom, 9 Dec. 2021

[7] "Revolution in Mental Health Treatment, Upper Hutt Leader, Vol XII, No. 18, 19 May 1955,

[8] The Hon. Mr. Acting Justice, J.P. Slattery, A.O., "Report of the Royal Commission Into Deep Sleep Therapy," NSW Royal Commission, Vol. 6, Dec. 1990, p. 96

[9] "30 sleep victims get \$1.1 m awards," Sydney Morning Herald, 20 Mar. 1992

[10] "Electroshock therapy on under-14s banned in WA after law passes Parliament," ABC News, 17 Oct. 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-17/mental-health-bill-passes-wa-parliament/5822874>

Amber Rauscher

Citizens Commission on Human Rights

+1 323-467-4242

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