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Alan Byrne will never recover from heat stroke

ALAN Byrne often wishes he had been in a horrific car crash rather than suffer heat stroke.

So severe is the damage he suffered working on a 42C day that the 33-year-old Berwick man has permanent brain damage, can no longer walk, has trouble talking and has even had to have his face rebuilt.

With summer's record heat already claiming at least 30 lives, emergency doctors are warning Victorians to be aware of the danger of heat stroke, which claims the life of one in four severe cases, before more hot days.

Mr Byrne's injuries have now become the subject of one of Australia's biggest [WorkCover](#) claims, with the \$580,000 in medical and loss of earnings costs already paid expected to be much more than \$1 million by the time his injuries are fully assessed.

Mr Byrne suffered injuries most people would associate with road trauma or assault when he collapsed after working as a brickie's labourer on a 42C day in Queensland on Valentines Day 2006.

As his organs shut down one by one while he battled on life support in hospital, it was doubted Mr Byrne would survive.

But rehabilitation services at Southern Health's Cranbourne Community Rehabilitation Centre are now helping him regain some of his former capabilities.

Two weeks before his collapse Mr Byrne had moved to Airlie Beach to start a new life, but he is now cared for by his parents Bernadette and Des at their Berwick home.

The heat caused his body to shut down, robbing his brain of oxygen.

The loss of oxygen in his blood was so severe his facial bones rotted away, requiring extensive surgery to rebuild his jaw, nose and lower face.

"Initially it looked like he had significant brain damage and wasn't ever going to be able to anything," Ms Byrne said. "But since then he has improved. I still see little improvements in him.

"Often Alan says he wishes he was in a car accident because people he saw in rehab can walk again, but he hasn't been able to yet."