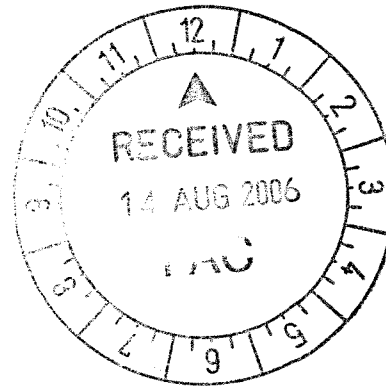


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10 August 2006

The Committee Manager
Public Accounts Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Madam/Sir

Home and Community Care Program Inquiry

I write to provide comment for the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program Inquiry. I have previously raised concerns about the HACC Program on behalf of constituents, and welcome this Inquiry as an opportunity to achieve better outcomes for HACC and Home Care Service users.

My submission addresses the joint arrangements for approval of the annual HACC expenditure plan, along with unmet needs, access to services, consumer input, and accountability for the Home Care Service.

Joint arrangements

I understand that the annual process for developing and approving a State HACC expenditure plan is complex. Both Commonwealth and State Government input is required and the process has taken up to 11 months to be finalised in the past. The result is underspending of funds and lack of service for the majority of the financial year, followed by a release of extra funds for expenditure in a short period before the end of the financial year.

Advocacy groups tell me that high priority needs get neglected in this environment and service users are affected by late approvals and delays in service provision. I support the proposal from NCOSS and other groups that the NSW State Government develop a three-year rolling plan in order to ensure the better use of resources and more consistent allocation of new funds.

- ***I recommend a three-year rolling state HACC expenditure plan to allow for earliest release of HACC funds.***

Home Care Service

Unmet Need

There is a longstanding need for increased funds for HACC services and I acknowledge previous attempts to expand this program. ***I am concerned about the need for greatly expanded funds to meet the growing levels of demand that HACC planning has identified.***

When the HACC program was initiated, Commonwealth and NSW State Governments agreed to increase funding each year in order to meet anticipated growth in need for services and the existing backlog in service provision. Analyses of previous budgets by NCOSS show that the funding has failed to keep up with the growth in needs. I believe that both the Commonwealth and

NSW State Governments should increase funding for HACC to address the backlog in service provision and meet current needs.

- ***I recommend that HACC funds, including for the Home Care Service, be increased in order to help address unmet need.***

Constituents who have had contact with HACC services tell me that the HACC service system is confusing, that it is difficult to understand the range of services, and that they have had trouble gaining access to services. I am concerned that potential service users who do not understand how the system operates are unlikely to have their needs met, particularly in an environment where demand is greater than supply.

The Auditor-General's 2004 report highlighted that the Home Care Service is often the first and only service that some service users contact. Service provider and advocacy groups tell me that improved coordination between the Home Care Service with other HACC and health service providers would improve access.

- ***I recommend that the Home Care Service improve coordination with other health and welfare services.***

Constituents tell me that they find it frustrating and difficult to understand that their eligibility for Home Care Service does not guarantee them access to help. The Auditor-General's report suggested that the Home Care Service maintain waiting lists for eligible clients so that services are allocated as soon as they are available.

- ***I recommend that the Home Care Service maintain waiting lists for people who need services but cannot be helped immediately.***

Access to services

Advocacy groups say that Home Care Service processes for managing access are unfair. I understand that the Home Care Service provides services to eligible people based on the date of their call, the person's location, and whether the local service provider has "service hours" available. The Auditor-General raised concerns about resulting inequality, and recommended that eligible applicants be referred to other providers where the local Home Care Service cannot meet their needs.

Advocacy groups tell me that although the Home Care Service implemented a Referral and Assessment Centre in response to this recommendation, inequality of access still occurs. They tell me that the Home Care Service only takes referrals if they there are service hours available at the local provider on the day of the call. People who have the capacity and resources to call every day are more likely to receive services.

Advocacy groups and service providers suggest that Home Care Service should record referrals on days when there are no service hours available and maintain a waiting list, and I support this suggestion.

- ***I recommend that the Home Care Service implement waiting lists and record referrals at all times.***

(3)

Some residents have told me that the Home Care Service does not reach residents in need from cultural and linguistically diverse communities. I have no evidence that Chinese, Russian, Aboriginal and other communities in my electorate get fair access to services.

Advocacy groups say that assessment processes are not culturally responsive. They suggest that the Home Care Service employ workers who speak languages other than English, and come from a wider range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

- ***I recommend that the Home Care Service take action to improve access for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including liaison with ethnic/cultural community organisations, proactive employment strategies, and culturally responsive assessment procedures.***

Consumer input

Constituents who have contacted me say that they would like to have more input into the way that services are designed and delivered. Advocacy groups tell me that few service users are aware of local consultations. They say that the majority of complaints against the Home Care Service are about access, and that these complaints are likely to be under-reported.

I support greater efforts to involve service users in service planning and design, and share NCOSS' suggestion that consultation and feedback processes include people who have been assessed as ineligible for services.

- ***I recommend that the Home Care Service review processes to improve service user and community feedback and participation.***

Accountability

The Auditor-General's report recommended that the Home Care Service define resources, service types, targets, and key performance indicators, and publicly report on performance against these measures.

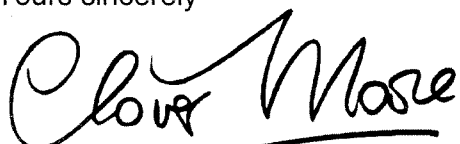
- ***I recommend that the Home Care Service document information about target groups, available services, service users, service applicants, and performance on key indicators; and publish this information.***

Constituents, service providers and advocacy groups tell me that the Home Care Service has become increasingly confusing and difficult to access. I support suggestions made by constituents, care services and advocacy groups that the Home Care Service improve coordination with other service providers, and carry out changes to improve access. I support suggestions that the Home Care Service improve planning and reporting in order to reduce complexity and provide fair access.

Predictions of an ageing population signal the need for greatly HACC services, which I understand cannot meet current levels of need, and I am very concerned that the Government should allocation additional resources for this important support system.

I look forward to seeing the report of this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Clover Moore
Member for Bligh