

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE  
TO THE NSW PARLIAMENT LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES SECOND REPORT  
A MATTER OF PRIORITY: REPORT ON DISABILITY SERVICES**

The Government is pleased to advise that, in response to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues' Second Report on Disability Services, *A Matter of Priority*, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care has considered the recommendations of the Committee in developing a strategic plan for disability services.

The Government welcomes the Committee's finding that the Government has progressively increased funding for disability services.

The Committee has made recommendations in a number of areas, including supported accommodation, respite care services, the devolution of medium and large residential centres and the group homes project. Key recommendations of the Committee include:

- That the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (formerly the Ageing and Disability Department) adopt a growth target of 200 additional permanent supported accommodation places for 5 years from the date of the report;
- Implementation of all recommendations from the Respite Working Group Report;
- All medium-large residential centres be funded to complete transition to models that comply with the Disability Services Act by 31/12/10;
- That as part of the strategic plan, funding is identified to ensure 80% of residents of large centres are transferred to appropriate community accommodation by 31/12/05; and
- That the Department of Community Services should submit Expressions of Interest for all services in the group homes project.

To a large extent, the accommodation growth proposal is predicated on a traditional and narrowly defined support response. The Government, through the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), is moving to ensure a much greater range of supports are available to assist individuals to live in their communities either with their families or independently. In particular, the Government is committed to enhancing prevention and support infrastructure in ways that maximise the capacity of people with disabilities and their families to participate in community life. At a state level, this is achieved in part through partnerships between the Department and other mainstream agencies, such as the Departments of Housing and Health. This is a model that also enables more equitable access to resources than has historically been possible.

Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that it takes time to adjust objectives and priorities where there are circumstances of ageing parents having cared for a son or daughter over a lifetime with limited support.

In terms of the need for growth, the broad targets identified by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in 1997 for addressing unmet demand in NSW were estimated to require additional recurrent funding of approximately \$100m. Following successful negotiations between the State and Commonwealth Governments in 2000, the NSW Government committed an additional \$93.4m to disability services in 2000/01, with a Commonwealth contribution of \$16.8m targeted towards ageing carers. For 2001/02 an additional \$33.4 million per annum has been negotiated with the Commonwealth Government under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement. This will provide additional services that enable people with disabilities with ageing carers to remain supported by their families within their community.

The level of investment in coming years to maintain current and future infrastructure to support people with disabilities in the community requires further research and investigation. This will inform a critical element of NSW's position leading up to the re-negotiation of the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement (CSDA) in 2002. This process also needs to take into account the impact of current investment and changes in social, demographic and economic patterns, as well as related expectations. Particular attention will need to be given both to ageing carers and people with disabilities who are ageing. In this context, discussions with the Commonwealth will also need to occur in relation to access to Commonwealth aged services, including residential services, and Home and Community Care (HACC) supports.

Respite reform is underway. Following the review of respite care services, DADHC prepared an Action Plan to implement the accepted recommendations. The Department is currently implementing the key elements of this Action Plan. The major aims of this respite reform program are twofold: first to free up residential respite care beds that have been blocked and secondly to increase the flexibility and capacity of the respite care system.

Substantial work has been undertaken to date to develop a comprehensive picture of existing respite service capacity including identification of the number of blocked respite care beds. A more thorough data collection approach is currently being developed which will allow tracking and monitoring of the respite care system to prevent further beds being blocked. New funding initiatives such as the Service Access System are closely linked to this work and have a role in relocating individuals to more suitable accommodation. Targets for unblocking beds are being set by the Department to effectively measure system performance.

A significant level of new funding has been allocated to the respite care system. In 1999/2000 \$4.6 million was allocated to provide a range of flexible respite options across NSW and additional funds of \$4 million have been targeted for respite care in 2001/2002. Comprehensive service guidelines which will operate across both Disability and HACC funded respite care services are currently under development. These will guide respite care delivery and will

assist in increasing the flexibility of respite services to better meet the wide range of service user requirements.

The Government has committed to completion of the devolution of all medium and large residential centres by 2010. The Committee raised the issue of hastening the pace of devolution. However the reality is that the process involves a substantial amount of consultation, assessment and planning. The needs and concerns of people with disabilities involved in the process, their families and carers must be sensitively managed. All timelines need to be realistic and not bring undue pressure on the central participants. The Government is pleased to note that the Committee has, given the complexity and importance of the devolution process, accepted the 2010 timeframe.

The key issue around Group Homes was engaging the Department of Community Services (DoCS) in the Expression of Interest process. The Government is pleased to advise that DoCS participated in all 41 of the service development proposals.

Finally, in addition to enhanced investment for direct services, the report expresses concerns about the staffing capacity of the former Ageing and Disability Department to achieve roll-out. The NSW Government has brought together responsibility for ageing and disability policy, planning, funding and services in a new organisation. The new Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) is a logical progression from the establishment of the Ageing and Disability Department in 1995 and the separation last year of disability from child protection services in the Department of Community Services. Its creation on 11 April 2001 will help leverage better outcomes for people with disabilities and also achieve an enhanced emphasis on ageing issues.