

Friday, June 29, 2007

IT'S ABOUT TIME FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PLAYED CATCH-UP ON DISABILITY FUNDING

Disability Minister Jay Weatherill has welcomed the Federal Government's decision to increase spending on South Australians with a disability and their families.

"It's high time the Commonwealth spent some of its \$10.6 billion surplus on this group of people," Mr Weatherill said.

"Despite South Australia having the highest rate of people with a disability in the country, the Commonwealth's share of investment into disability services has been declining for years.

"Now, they are finally playing catch up."

State and Territory Disability Ministers have written a joint letter to the Federal Government with a counter offer for the fourth Commonwealth State Disability Agreement (CSTDA).

"The current CSTDA expires on Saturday 30 June 2007 and the offer that the Commonwealth has put on the table represents no real increase on the existing agreement and offers a paltry indexation rate of just 1.9%," Mr Weatherill said.

"We have proposed that fourth CSTDA include additional growth funding of \$3.4 billion over five years – on top of the funding announced yesterday.

"This offer from the States includes a more generous indexation rate and extra money to meet the growth in the numbers of people with disabilities. It seeks to protect the real value of the Commonwealth State arrangements.

"This \$3.4 billion – and then dollar for dollar matched funding for additional respite and accommodation services - is essential to ensure that growing demand is met. This commitment would also ensure that existing services continue to provide vital support to people with a disability, their families and carers. The States and Territories believe that if the Commonwealth agrees to our counter offer significant improvements will be delivered to people with a disability, their families and carers across Australia."

Mr Weatherill has warned people to look at the detail of the new Federal funding packages.

"The devil is always in the detail. The eligibility requirements for the Commonwealth's support measures in supported accommodation and respite are very tight, targeted only at people over the age of 40 with a disability who have *older* carers," Mr Weatherill said.

"This means that significant population groups will miss out, despite having high levels of unmet need.

"These include younger people under 40 living with their family, and all people living

alone or in supported residential facilities.

“For instance, parents who are 55 with a 25 year old son or daughter will not be eligible for the new Commonwealth scheme for another fifteen years – until their son or daughter reaches 40.

“This is of great concern given the nature of South Australia’s current demand pressures.

“Just when South Australia has been reforming our disability services to make it easier for people to get the help they need, by creating a one stop shop and a single, supported accommodation waiting list, the Commonwealth is creating the potential for more confused and fragmented services.”

Mr Weatherill said that at this stage it is unclear how many of these new services will be specifically for South Australians.

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