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PM - Disability ministers walk out on Brough

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Reporter: Chris Uhlmann

MARK COLVIN: State and territory disability ministers walked out of a meeting with their federal counterpart today. They claimed that the Community Services Minister Mal Brough had tried to pit them against each other.

The meeting was supposed to settle a new five-year disability funding agreement, but it ended in disarray after the states rejected the Commonwealth's offer.

All sides agree on one thing - the disabled need a lot more resources and, after today, they're no closer to getting them.

Chief Political Correspondent Chris Uhlmann asked Mal Brough for his version of what went wrong.

MAL BROUGH: Having first put our negotiating position on the table in February at official's level, today we invited the states and territories to go back to their jurisdictions to work up a plan of how to deal with the unmet need of supported accommodation and respite care, present that to the Federal Government and we would consider those on a dollar for dollar funding basis and to put new money into the sector, which can actually address this very difficult and challenging area for parents in particular who are looking after their children and can't find appropriate levels of care.

Unfortunately, after a 10 or 15 caucusing by the state and territory ministers, they returned to the meeting, made a written statement, or read a written statement and promptly closed the meeting.

CHRIS UHLMANN: Now, this had always been an agreement that the Commonwealth did with all the states and territories. They're saying you tried to split this up into bilateral agreements - why did you do that?

MAL BROUGH: Yeah no, we didn't do that. What we've said to them is that we will not have an agreement which doesn't actually deliver for people with disabilities.

So, we're asking for external accreditation of disability services, and I don't think anyone can argue with that because, can you imagine in the aged care sector for one minute, not having external validation of the quality of those services.

We're asking for accountability and transparency and we're asking to have the unmet need identified so we can start to tackle it, and the fourth one was just access for Indigenous people.

Those things they agreed to in principle, and we said on that basis, we would have an agreement. We're then happy to deal with them collectively or individually.

CHRIS UHLMANN: Well, they're also saying that you wouldn't tell them how much money was on the table from the Commonwealth, what conditions were attached and you were looking at an indexation of 1.8 per cent which was well below inflation for the money that you already provide.

MAL BROUGH: Let's cut to the chase. Is what we have asked the state and territory governments to do over the last five years, is to give good data as to what the unmet need is.

They haven't done that. I believe they have it. The Commonwealth certainly doesn't have it. We don't deliver these services. So, what we've said to them is, "Go away and get that data, have a plan to address unmet need and we will consider funding that on a 50-50 basis".

We cannot be fairer than that. That's better than indexation, that's better than anything else. But most importantly Chris, it means that for every additional dollar that's spent, we can expect to see a positive outcome, a real, supported accommodation or respite bed for somebody who desperately needs it rather than money going to the states and territories without there being any guarantee of a delivery of an additional service.

CHRIS UHLMANN: Could that unmet need be as high as \$11 billion, which was a figure that was kicked around when the Senate report on disabilities was handed down earlier this year?

MAL BROUGH: Chris, I couldn't say whether it's that big, but we do know it is very substantial. And I don't have that data, the states have that data. Even if it's not perfect data, they have some idea, and that's why we're saying to them, "You have the information, you develop the plan, come to us".

And we have an open mind, we have said that we will evaluate that and consider their offers not on 80-20 split, which is what the disabilities agreement currently is, but on 50-50 split.

We will shoulder more of the load and I believe that, perhaps more reasonable minds when they go back to the states and territories will prevail and they'll come back knowing that this is a genuine attempt to make a real inroad into the unmet need.

CHRIS UHLMANN: This is a bad look for all of you isn't it because everyone agrees that there is a huge unmet need out there and what we're seeing at the moment is the people responsible for delivering services are fighting amongst themselves.

MAL BROUGH: Yeah, and this just seems to go on time and time and time again. They basically put on the table saying, "We want \$2-billion from you". And what we have said is, "I want a plan."

MARK COLVIN: The Federal Community Services Minister Mal Brough, talking to Chris

Uhlmann.

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