

Position Statement on the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement CSTDA

The Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement, CSTDA, is a joint five year Agreement between the Australian Government and the governments of the states and territories about the provision of funding to support people with disabilities. The third CSTDA ended on 30 June 2007 and negotiations have been extended for six months. However many in the NSW disability sector have serious concerns.

Under the new CSTDA, the Australian Government offered one dollar in additional funding for every dollar spent by states and territories on unmet need in supported accommodation and respite. Very warmly welcomed in NSW, this was to address critical and desperate unmet need.

Now suddenly, the Commonwealth offer of CSTDA matched growth funding has been withdrawn, without notice. NSW could now miss out on up to \$428million in matched funding from the Commonwealth over the next five years.

The Prime Minister announced the *Disability Assistance Package* which he said was in addition to the CSTDA. This package could deliver up to 550 new supported accommodation places and 270 new respite places in NSW. The NSW *Stronger Together* Plan, a ten year plan for disability services, sets out the NSW Government's strong commitment to disability unmet need across a range of support services. Together, the NSW *Stronger Together* Plan and the Commonwealth *Disability Assistance Package* could deliver up to 1550 new supported accommodation places in NSW by 2011. Even with these new places, there will be a huge shortfall in support for people with disabilities in NSW.

The recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report conservatively estimates that NSW needs between 7,000 and 10,000 places to approach critical unmet need for supported accommodation for people with disabilities in the community. Similarly, the need for respite care outstrips supply. The recent Senate Inquiry into the CSTDA recommended substantial additional spending on supported accommodation and respite services. This is why we need the Commonwealth to match unmet need. Then we need the Commonwealth and State to work together to deliver more than these first steps.

Principles for our Position

- The CSTDA must remain a national agreement with the states and territories to support people with disabilities across Australia.
- As a national Agreement, the CSTDA must be fair, equitable and transparent in its funding processes.
- The CSTDA must ensure the best possible supports are provided to people with disabilities wherever they live in Australia.
- The CSTDA must improve access and services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability who have previously been largely neglected. Of critical importance is a provision for the funding of national, state and territory networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.
- The CSTDA should provide better transparency and accountability as well as improved accreditation for disability services

- The CSTDA should assist states and territories to address all unmet need for disability services
- The CSTDA should provide a balance between responding to crisis, and prevention and early intervention. Instead of a vacancy managed system, the CSTDA should provide pathways that enable people with disabilities to move out of their family home in a planned way prior to family breakdown. This respects the needs of both the person with disability and their carer.
- All forward spending plans towards unmet need must be eligible for matched growth spending from the Australian Government.

Multi-lateral Agreement

We support the CSTDA as a multi-lateral national agreement where states and territories are treated fairly and equitably and where processes for funding allocation and distribution are transparent. There should be no competition between states for disability funding, which will occur if we move away from a multi-lateral agreement.

Equitable Process

The Commonwealth should use the same transparent process for the allocation of matched growth funding with all states and territories. NSW should be subject to the same requirements and then eligible for the same proportional Commonwealth contributions as other jurisdictions. After all, why should a person with disability in Fremantle be treated differently to a person in Campbelltown when it comes to unmet need?

Include proposed expenditure plans

In 2006, the NSW Government's \$1.3 billion *Stronger Together* Disability Plan was eagerly welcomed by people with disability and their families. This five years' expenditure is an excellent first step in delivering desperately needed services in NSW. This Plan, however, was always designed to complement the CSTDA, never to be a stand alone package.

Indexation for viability

The Australian Government has offered indexation at 1.8% (\$400 million over five years) if the states and territories can fulfill four conditions covering improving transparency and accountability, quantifying unmet need, initiating independent accreditation systems and improving access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. To avoid possible cuts to services, indexation under the CSTDA must be at least 3.3% just to meet wage increases under the NSW SACS award legally due 1 July 2007.

What needs to be done?

As a matter of urgency, we call on the Australian Government to:

- offer matched growth funding to NSW's unmet need expenditure proposals / forward estimates for the life of the CSTDA
- maintain and strengthen the CSTDA as a national agreement
- Implement a transparent and equitable process for funds allocation for NSW and among states and territories
- increase the indexation rate to at least 3.3% per annum

We call on the NSW Government to:

- maintain and strengthen the CSTDA as a national agreement

- hold firm with the states and territories in maintaining a multi-lateral approach to CSTDA negotiations
- prepare a robust case for the *Stronger Together* expenditure and other plans for disability unmet need to attract CSTDA matched growth funding
- ensure a balance, with all new funding, between crisis responses and planned alternate pathways that enable people with disabilities to move out of the family home prior to family breakdown.

What you can do:

- write to your state and federal members of Parliament and Senators with your concerns
- write to your local papers
- distribute this information to people with disabilities, their friends and families and through your networks

Helpful Resources:

- contact details for federal politicians can be obtained at www.aph.gov.au and
- for state members of parliament at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au
- Senate Inquiry Report can be obtained at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/cstda/report/index.htm
- AIHW report entitled *Current and Future Demand for Specialist Disability Services* (8 June 2007) and is available at www.aihw.gov.au/disability