



26 July 2007

The Hon Mal Brough, MP
Minister for Family and Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Re: Commonwealth State/Territory Disability matters

We, the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), People with Disability (PWD), the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and the State and Territory Councils of Social Service, are writing to you in regard to Commonwealth and State/Territory funding of disability services. While we recognise your Government's commitment to disability funding we are concerned about the way Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA) negotiations are progressing.

People with disability and organisations concerned with the provision of support and services to them, are aware of the shortcomings of the current CSTDA. However, we strongly believe in the need for a negotiated national framework to guide planning for initiatives that address the needs of people with disability. To achieve this requires the careful cultivation of good will among the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

On 23 February 2007, a number of disability and welfare organisations wrote to you to propose that the National Reform Agenda offered an example of effective cooperation between Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments which could be usefully adapted to the CSTDA. And on 24 April, ACOSS and the State and Territory Councils of Social Service wrote expressing support for CSTDA funding arrangements which strengthen the commitment of all governments to the Agreement.

Your original offer to match unmet needs funding on a 50:50 basis with the States and Territories appeared to be a generous one, and we note the significant funding attached to the recently announced Disability Assistance Package. However, we are concerned that withdrawing the offer of matched unmet need funding and moving the Commonwealth into direct service provision in areas of State responsibility, risks fragmenting disability services and undermining national standards. These moves may also be expected to weaken Commonwealth and State/Territory cooperation on disability matters.

Our other major concern is the lack of focus on the needs of people with disability in the Commonwealth's Disability Assistance Package, which focuses instead on the needs of 'families with disabled members who they are caring for'.

People with disability are the end service recipients of the package and the services funded through it must be implemented in a way that benefits them. Providing people with disability with the support services they require to participate in community life is the primary way of meeting their need for meaningful inclusion and opportunities to fully participate in community life. Through this, we also provide support for their families.

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In this respect we are particularly troubled by the Government's announcement that it intends to create 'nursing home style' accommodation for people with disability receiving support from aged carers. The package provides for 1750 supported accommodation places offered through 175 facilities, which amounts to ten-bed congregate care accommodation, a type of accommodation that is not consistent with disability services legislation.

In light of these issues we ask you to:

- re-affirm the Australian Government's commitment to negotiating an effective, national CSTDA which holds State and Territory Governments accountable for performance
- put the offer of increased funding for unmet needs back on the table, adjusted to take account of the differences in State and Territory Government per capita funding of disability services as at 1 July 2007
- offer realistic indexation and growth funding under the CSTDA
- put people with disability at the centre of the Commonwealth Disability Assistance Package and ensure consistency with disability services legislation as the Package is further developed and implemented.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you and with State and Territory Governments to continue to improve the responsiveness of disability services to the needs of people with disability, as well as their families and carers.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson
Executive Director, ACOSS

Sam Jenkinson
Acting CEO, AFDO

Robert Farley
President, People with Disability

cc State and Territory Disability Ministers