



Friday 10 August 2007

Commonwealth fail to meet deadline on funding negotiations

Negotiating the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement with Minister Mal Brough has descended into farce, or more like a tragedy considering the families involved, according to Disability Services Minister Kristina Keneally.

“Now we have Minister Brough claiming he will ‘extract’ all adults over 40 with ageing parents to the Commonwealth – with absolutely no consultation with parents or service providers, and no detail on how or when this might occur,” Ms Keneally said.

Ms Keneally chaired a meeting of all Disability Services ministers in Sydney on 25 July, where Minister Brough stated that the Commonwealth would take ‘jurisdictional responsibility’ for all people with a disability over 40 years old with parents over 65.

“Minister Brough claimed this step would ‘free up’ funding for the States and Territories, and it was his excuse for rejecting the State and Territories proposal of \$3.4 billion in new money in the next round of the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement.”

Ms Keneally said that when she pressed Minister Brough about the details of his ‘jurisdictional takeover’ he was unable to answer basic questions, instead agreeing to provide written information to all State and Territories by the end of July.

“As of today – the 9th of August – I have yet to receive this information. I understand that my State and Territory counterparts also have not heard from Minister Brough,” Ms Keneally said.

“Just like he’s doing in Housing, every few weeks Minister Brough abruptly decides on a change of direction in disability services – without warning, without discussion and without any detail.

“First we had supposedly ‘unlimited’ offers of bilateral funding for accommodation and respite, which ruled out NSW’s significant forward investment in services and which was then hastily withdrawn the very day NSW put their offer to the Commonwealth.

“Then we had the announcement of a Disability Assistance Package, nearly half of which turned out to be time-limited pension payments.

“Given he’s performing the same antics in the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, I’m concerned that he’s just pulling stunts in an election year – and meanwhile, people with a disability miss out.

“Sadly, Minister Brough’s behaviour is holding up the finalisation of the CSTDA, which is already overdue. The States and Territories proposal for the CSTDA would inject significant new growth – 5.5%, or \$3.4 billion of new money – across Australia.”

Ms Keneally said she was encouraged that the recent meeting showed some signs of progress, with all jurisdictions agreeing to the national priorities for CSTDA 4.

“However, I remain concerned that the issue of funding is unresolved. The Commonwealth refuses to budge from its inadequate 1.9% growth rate or recognise forward estimates – such as the NSW Government’s \$1.3 billion plan *Stronger Together* – as part of the negotiations.”

“The Lemna Government’s \$1.3 billion *Stronger Together* plan would see more money put into disability services in NSW than the Commonwealth was promising for the entire country.

Ms Keneally also noted that over the life of the last CSTDA the NSW Government spent approximately \$756 million more than required, whilst the Commonwealth had provided just \$60 million extra nationally over the same period.

“Our commitment in NSW through *Stronger Together* is to improve the lives of people with a disability, their families and carers through increased services that strengthen families and support community participation. That commitment will not waver, no matter how many political games Minister Brough wants to play with services to some of the most vulnerable members of our community,” Ms Keneally said.

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