



## **NSW DISABILITY ACTION ALLIANCE FORUM**

The Theatre at NSW Parliament House was full to capacity on 13/11/02 when the NSW Disability Action Alliance (NDAA) held a pre-election forum to provide representatives from the major and minor parties the opportunity to discuss their disability policies. The forum also provided a limited opportunity for people with a wide range of disabilities, their carers and organisations working with and for people with disabilities to submit questions to the politicians.

NDAA includes MHCC, People with Disabilities NSW, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association, Physical Disability Council of NSW, Family Advocacy, NSW Council for Intellectual Disability, Statewide Disability Coalition, Disability Services Aboriginal Corporation, NSW Association of the Deaf, People living with HIV/AIDS, Deaf Blind Association of NSW, Blind Citizens Australia NSW, and Disability Safeguards Coalition.

Politicians in attendance were:

- Carmel Tebbutt, MLC – Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth.
- Brad Hazzard MP – Member for Wakehurst, Shadow Minister for Community Services, Shadow Minister for Disability Services, Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.
- Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, MLC, Australian Democrats.
- Ian Cohen, MLC – The Greens.

Each of the politicians covered a range of relevant issues in their speeches, including areas relevant for mental health. They all expressed support for the peak bodies and emphasised their willingness to discuss issues with the peak bodies and to receive information from them. Expressing concern about the high proportion of the prison population with mental illness and/or intellectual disability, they supported the court diversion scheme and acknowledged that resources need to be improved or redirected to the scheme. Many identified the problem of the “silo mentality” of government departments wherein each department is separate from other departments, which makes accessing a variety of services difficult. This is particularly difficult for disabled people who need services from various departments. They expressed support for the idea of improved co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration between government departments and between the government and non-government sectors. The aim of this is to increase awareness of available services and improve accessibility. Another issue identified was that of ageing carers, their concerns and need for support.

There was a broad range of questions asked which included the following topics:

- Support for people with mental illness particularly in relation to home care provided

- by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care;
- Support and resources for the Court Diversion Scheme for people with mental illness;
- Different levels of funding for people with intellectual disability living at home or in institutions;
- Strategies for getting younger people with disabilities out of aged care facilities;
- Funding of services and organisations for people who are blind and deaf/blind;
- Provision of sign language interpreters particularly with regard to health services;

Unfortunately there was inadequate time to ask all the questions that people wanted to ask. It was agreed that the organisers of the forum would collate the questions and forward them to the politicians. Questions forwarded in relation to mental health focus on:

- Recurrent funding for community based rehabilitation services that use recovery models;
- Transparency in funding of mental health services;
- Proportion of the mental health budget that is spent on the NGO sector;
- As the Minister was not present when the question relating to provision of home care for people with a mental illness was asked, that question has also been forwarded.

Further information will be made available when responses are received from the politicians.

The NSW Disability Action Alliance (which includes MHCC) will be organising further pre-election forums in the lead up to the state election in March 2003. The aim is to hold them in marginal seats. MHCC members will be kept informed of dates and venues.

[BACK](#)