

Now you see it... now you don't - Disability Funding in Crisis

In an alarming development, Federal Minister Mal Brough has withdrawn an offer of matched funding to all states that allocates new funds as part of the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA). The surprise announcement on July 4 will affect all states except WA, NT and ACT, and will mean that growth funding in the area of accommodation and respite care for people with disabilities will be greatly affected. NSW could lose up to \$428 million in matched funding over the next 5 years.

Negotiations between states, territories and the Commonwealth have been underway to negotiate a new CSTDA to replace the previous agreement that expired on June 30 2007. The Commonwealth had announced an 'open cheque book' offer to match dollar for dollar any extra funding allocated by states and territories in an attempt to address the unmet demand for supported accommodation and respite care. State and federal ministers were to meet on July 25 to further negotiate the terms of the new CSTDA. The uncapped Commonwealth offer was subsequently withdrawn without notice.

In late June the prime minister made an announcement that the Commonwealth Disability Assistance package, worth 1.8 billion, was in addition to the CSTDA offer of matched funding. The NSW 'Stronger together' funds in addition to the new Commonwealth Disability Assistance package could have provided an estimated 1500 new accommodation places across the state. However the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare believes 7 000-10 000 places are needed in NSW alone to address the accommodation crisis. A recent Senate Inquiry into the CSTDA recommended further spending on respite and accommodation support to help fill the gap between supply and demand for such services within the disability sector.

A position statement organised by NCSS has been endorsed by a number of relevant organisations, including MHCC, outlining the community sector's response to the withdrawal of promised funds.

The paper calls for immediate action by the Australian Government to:

Restore the CSTDA matched funding offer

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%

The paper calls 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

Contact details for state members of parliament are available at:

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au

Senate Inquiry Report can be obtained at:

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/cstda/report/index.htm

For copies of the position paper go to:

www.ncoss.org.au/hot/disability/cstda-final-17july07.pdf