

MINORITY REPORT

Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and/or Mental Illness

The Coalition initiated this inquiry in the Legislative Council based on the importance of appropriate accommodation for people with a disability and/or mental illness and the clear and evident failure of the Brumby Government to adequately address the issue. While we support the extensive recommendations made by the Committee, we have a number of concerns relating to the lack of urgency to solve the issues in the report, especially in the Executive Summary and also the Government's overall lack of responsiveness to this inquiry.

Summary of Recommendations

The Coalition supports the evidence received regarding the failure of this Government to ensure appropriate provision of supported accommodation and supports the range of recommendations provided throughout the report to address those failures.

The committee has recommended additional supported accommodation beds for people with a disability and/or mental illness, more respite care, additional individual support packages and the need for reform and long term planning to better support carers and the people they care for in the future.

Report Lacks Urgency

This report however fails to convey the real sense of urgency that is needed to address the failings in the Victorian Government's supported accommodation system.

Most evident in the submissions and hearings was the desperation that is felt by so many of the families and carers who care for loved ones as well as the frustration of disability and mental health organisations who participated in the Inquiry.

Family members painted a bleak picture of people with a mental illness and/or disability languishing on waiting lists with no hope in sight. Submissions highlighted the desperation of parents and families who have dedicated most of their lives caring for their child and battling an "uncaring" DHS bureaucracy.

Ageing parent carers told of being unable to plan for the future and of being too afraid to die for fear of not knowing what would happen to their adult son or daughter with a disability. Managers told of the

heartbreak of families who are forced to abandon their children to the system as there are no other options and they just cannot go on.

The consistent messages of crisis and hopelessness that were expressed by the families, carers, community groups and service providers during the inquiry demand immediate action from the Government.

Voices of Families

Much of the deep, raw emotion shown by families, carers and managers throughout the hearings has been excluded from the report. While the report cannot show the tears in their eyes and detail their wavering voices and sense of despair, their words can be reproduced to capture a family's reality:

Parents say that they are forced to:

Remain a prisoner of their own homes and live apart from the normality of the rest of the community.¹

And many are stuck in what has been described as a 'perpetual nightmare'.²

This experience was also reinforced by a number of key community sector organisations. A representative from Yooralla said that:

The criterion for placement in an accommodation service right now is generally homelessness.³

And from Carers Victoria:

*...I think it is important to state that at June 2008 the disability support register had recorded 1358 people waiting for disability support accommodations options...**we are actually dealing with a crisis**⁴*

This sense of crisis is exacerbated by a lack of adequate support for carers and people with a disability or mental illness while they wait to access supported accommodation. Families are under even more pressure with inadequate and inflexible respite which fails to meet growing levels of demand to sustain carers in their role.

¹ Alan G Field OAM Submission

² Mark & Luke Modra Submission

³ Yooralla Hearing, 22 October 2008

⁴ Carers Victoria Hearing 22 October 2008

We're talking about having to go with begging bowls to the table of the government to ask for in-home support, out-of-home support, respite support, any other kind of support that you can think of.⁵

The anxiety and sense of crisis that plagues so many Victorian families and people with a mental illness or disability was not fully articulated in the report and certainly not conveyed in the Executive Summary.

Lack of respect and appreciation of carers

The feelings of desperation are perpetuated due to the exclusion of families in the planning and decision making concerning the person they care for and their dissatisfaction with the culture and approach of the Victorian Government.

Many parents and carers have reported being excluded from the assessment, planning and treatment phases and say they lack the information they need to allow them to perform their caring role.

Regrettably the culture in DHS is one of paternalism...the attitude of DHS is to exclude families.⁶

A representative from Carers Victoria also highlighted similar concerns, including:

Families are often shut out of decision making around the needs of their sons and daughters. Families often feel excluded from participating in decision making around the care and management of their son or daughter, even when they are in a residential facility.⁷

While the lack of engagement with families in the treatment and support of their family member are addressed in the later stages of the report, the importance of the issue was overlooked by its omission from the Executive Summary.

Inquiry Process

The Committee's ability to complete the report was hindered by the lack of responsiveness from the Department of Human Services. Data requests took many months and many reminder letters and phone calls to be provided. The July 2008 data request was received in

⁵ Gippsland Carers Association Hearing, 21 October 2008

⁶ Cliff Stephens Submission

⁷ Carers Victoria, Hearing, 22 October 2008

December 2008 and was incomplete. In July 2009 another request was made to update the data for the new financial year and fill in gaps in information. A proportion of this information was provided by the Department on 11th November 2009 and as late as December information was still being clarified.

The Minister for Community Services, Lisa Neville, despite platitudes about the importance of the Committee's work also failed to genuinely assist in the inquiry. The Minister:

- repeatedly declined invitations to appear before the Committee
- declined to allow the Chief Psychiatrist and the Senior Practitioner to appear at a public hearing
- failed to ensure any timeliness in the Department's response to Committee requests and herself responded on the 6th December to an October 2008 request for a public hearing with Departmental officials scheduled for the 10th December; and
- refused to allow the important DHS data provided to the Committee to be treated as a submission and used as evidence in the inquiry.

It is understandable that many families and carers who contributed to this inquiry are incredibly frustrated about having had to wait more than 22 months to see the outcomes and recommendations.

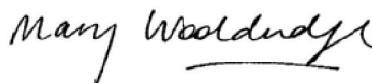
Despite the challenges faced by the Committee in undertaking the inquiry, there are many important recommendations which we encourage the Government to take up with urgency.

Finally, we would like to thank the many individuals, families and organisations who invested many hours and much emotion to contribute to this inquiry. All people with a disability and/or mental illness deserve the stability and security of appropriate accommodation and their families and carers deserve the peace of mind that would bring.

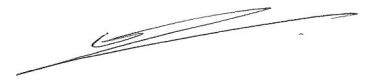
The greatest respect the Victorian Government could show to affected individuals and families is to urgently and comprehensively act on these findings.



Jeanette Powell MLA
Deputy Chair



Mary Wooldridge MLA
Committee Member



Bernie Finn MLC
Committee Member