

# **COST HIKE by STEALTH**

*Media Release from Minister Mary Wooldridge, MP,  
Minister for Disability Services and Reform, Tuesday 29 October 2013*

New disability accommodation charge to provide simplicity, more transparency, greater certainty.

A new board and lodging fee for government-managed disability accommodation will be simpler, more transparent and provide greater certainty for residents.

Minister for Disability Services and Reform Mary Wooldridge said that following broad consultation, a new Board and Lodging fee will be implemented in early 2014 for 2,100 residents in government-run accommodation.

The new fee bundles all existing charges into a single, transparent fee that includes the cost of a person's rent, utilities, communications including telephone, communal furnishings and whitegoods, food, general household consumables, household equipment and utensils and bedding and linen.

This fee will incorporate expenses that can vary significantly such as electricity and other utility bills, providing residents with greater certainty in relation to their disposable income.

The changes will also enable people with disability living in government-managed disability residential services to access and contribute Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) towards the cost of their residential charge.

The changes do not implement the previously proposed fee increase of 75 per cent of the disability support pension. The only impact on a resident's disposable income will be adjustments for cost-of-living increases equivalent to adjustments in the Disability Support Pension.

In order to assist the transition to the new Board and Lodging fee, the government is seeking to amend the Disability Act 2006 to clarify the role of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) in relation to setting fees for disability residential services.

To be introduced to Parliament this week, the amendments will ensure government and non-government providers can make fee adjustments reflecting income from CRA, as well as cost-of-living increases.

Residents or their administrators will retain their rights to apply for a VCAT review of fee changes. However, if a residential fee change makes adjustments for cost-of-living increases or CRA, VCAT must dismiss it.

Ms Wooldridge also announced that the Coalition Government is initiating a review of residential fees in supported accommodation.

The review will provide advice on the development of a fair and equitable fee structure for residential services as disability support transitions to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Issues to be examined include charging models; the impact on residents of other disability related costs such as fees for day services and transport; hardship policies; and opportunities to improve processes and reduce administrative burden.

Service providers and disability advocates will be consulted in the review process, which will be conducted by the State Services Authority.

**LISA Comment:** The Minister tried before to increase costs without justification. This is another ploy to get residents to pay towards their support service costs, which no person with a disability should pay.

The residents of CSO (non-government services) are forced to contribute towards their support service costs, as the DHS do not fully fund CSOs for support service costs, as they do their own direct care services.

It is quite wrong that the residents of CSOs have, therefore, to pay more than DHS residents, when DHS residents, to which the Minister refers (the 2,100), pay their way for their daily living within the very fair, transparent and accountable CERS (Client Expenditure Recording System).

CERS is not bundled, allowing the transparent rent component to provide the resident with an entitlement to proper residential tenancy rights – an important proviso to residents having real rights in the home for which they are seen to be paying rent.

The residents of CSO group homes currently pay around \$100 per week more than the residents of DHS group homes for a similar service. Rather than make CSO equal with DHS, the Minister's last cash-grab attempt was to make DHS equal with CSOs.

The Minister, frustrated and angry at being denied her despotic grab for cash, in August, from very disadvantaged people, is showing, in her media release, to be determined to get her way by stage- stealth this time – format to a bundle now, under a range of extremely questionable reasons, and raise the cost of the bundle later.

The bevy of so called reasons the said bundle would be better than the current CERS is just smoke and mirrors. We have administered a CERS account since its inception in the early 90s without any questions or concerns what-so-ever.

The underhanded manoeuvring by the state government of Victoria clearly has many hidden agendas, not the least being to reduce costs for the NDIS.

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