

Fee increases set to hit supported accommodation residents by Megan Bailey, Diamond Valley Leader, May 29, 2013

A Watsonia family says it will be hit hard when the State Government increases rent and cost payments for disability pensioners living in supported accommodation.

Tony and Heather Tregale, who run a group called, Lifestyle in Supported Accommodation, say the change means their son Paul, 36, who has autism, would not have much left when his fee increases by 50 per cent in December.

Mr Tregale estimated residents in the group would pay an average \$360 extra a month under the new board and lodgement fee.

People living in supported houses pay half their disability pension in rent. "Everyone will be badly affected," Mr Tregale said.

"For example, we will have to go without some things.

"Our son has two massages a week.

"It's sad that they won't be able to do that and things that are quite simple like (massages) or going to a pool."

Department of Human Services figures show the change means the average resident will pay \$17,500 per year, but the new charge will cover expenses for food, utilities and furniture, which residents pay for on top of their rent.

The average resident in supported accommodation costs the State Government \$128,000 a year.

The Department of Human Services did not respond to the Diamond Valley Leader before deadline.

Casualties of Disability Care

VALID Media Release by Kevin Stone

*2,500 Victorians with Disability Set to Suffer
as State Government Lifts Accommodation Fees*

Put a cork in the champagne bottle. Celebrations for Victoria's signing onto the NDIS have been soured by one of the harshest and most callous State Government decisions we can recall.

While we have all welcomed the promise of the NDIS to meet the unmet needs of people with disability, who could have predicted it would come at the cost of reducing the quality of life for the approximately 2,500 people already receiving State-managed supported accommodation support services?

Disability Accommodation Service residents and their administrators have this week received notice of a massive hike in fees, from between 48%-58% of the DSP to introduce a 75% Board and Lodgings Fee. Bizarrely, they have been told that this will make them eligible for the Commonwealth Rental Assistance subsidy - which the State Government also intends to fully claim!

The justification is that this will bring these services into line with non-government services and services in other States. VALID completely rejects this rationale and condemns this decision. Its effect will be to drastically reduce what is already a meagre level of disposable income. In the past week, VALID has received many examples of financial plans that will see people's level of disposable income slashed, plunging them into the red. Already burdened with day service fees, medical fees, transport fees and all the other expenses of daily living, many people will not be able to afford the price of a ticket to the movies, a ride on the train or a coffee at a cafe.

So much for the hype of the State Plan. So much for the vision of the National Disability Strategy. So much for the hope of entitlement.

While VALID has welcomed the other State Government Budget decisions to fund the closure of Sandhurst and fund new ISP's, we reject the cynical linking of these decisions to the State's cruel grab for Commonwealth subsidy and resident pensions.

We support the promise of the NDIS, but we reject the idea that it should be based on the lowest common denominator. The NDIS must be about improving the quality of life for all Australians with a disability, and not lowering the lot of 2,500 Victorians in order to match the poverty levels of the most exploited.

VALID demands that the State Government issue a guarantee that no Victorian with a disability will be worse off as a result of the NDIS. While DHS has advised us that there will be a Financial Hardship provision to review individual circumstances, VALID has no confidence that Government's view of what might be deemed 'reasonable and necessary' expenses will match the real life needs of people with a disability. The Government must rescind its decision and engage with the sector in full and proper consultations, if it expects this sector to believe they truly have the interests of people with disability - and not the interests of political and economic buck-passing - at heart.