

Stop State Government Cash Grab from Disabled

Susie O'Brien, Herald Sun, August 7, 2013

I think it is absolutely disgraceful that the State Government is trying to take money off these people. Many would be unable to work out why they now suddenly can't afford essential day courses, or even medication or physio. Many don't even have anyone looking after them personally, just those hired to do so.

The Government is entitled to change the rules, but it should not change the living standards of the most vulnerable by \$5000 a year. New rules should only apply to those who are new to the schemes. It's supposed to provide more money to help others, but why are they robbing the poor to pay the poor? It's hard to think of more marginalised people than this group.

Sadly, we are probably going to hear many more stories like this as services are rationalised in the lead-up to the NDIS. There needs to be a clause stating that no one will be worse off.

The story is below. There is a facebook page called Fight the Fee Hike and you could leave a message of support.

Shame State Government Shame

Forty Victorian families have joined a class action to stop a government "cash grab" that will leave some of the state's most vulnerable people destitute.

Around 2500 disabled adults living in supported housing will have to pay 75 per cent of their disability pensions – up from 50 per cent - to the State Government under a new rent proposal.

The state will also take every cent of their federal rental allowance. Their families fear it will wipe out any benefits delivered by the federal Disability Care scheme, and leave their loved ones up to \$6000 worse off a year.

Many of those affected formerly lived at Kew Cottages, and have no living relatives to look out for their interests.

This decision will leave each disabled adult just \$5000 a year to pay for day programs, medication, outings, and taxis.

Many will no longer be able to afford day programs, which provide essential routine, activity and socialization.

Lawyer Ben von Einem from Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service is fighting to reverse the fee hike in VCAT.

“People literally would not be able to afford to buy a coffee or go to a movie.

“It’s deplorable treatment of the most vulnerable people in our society”, Mr von Einem said.

Despite the government advising people they could challenge the decision in VCAT, it is challenging the jurisdiction of VCAT to make a ruling, he said.

Kevin Stone, CEO of VALID, a leading disability advocacy group, said he feared the state was “walking away from disability services in the lead up to the NDIS”.

Yesterday Melbourne mother-of-four Deborah Johnson said her two eldest sons, Andrew 26, and Will, 29, who both lived in supported accommodation, would not be able to afford their annual \$3000 day programs, let alone private health insurance and private psychiatric care.

They would together be more than \$8000 in the red, she said.

Michael Moore, a spokesperson for Disability Minister Mary Wooldridge, said the changes will make residential services consistent across state and community-run facilities and help 720 people waiting for services.

“We are not expecting families or carers to pay for a resident’s reasonable daily living expenses,” he said.

A family angered

Our son with an intellectual disability lives in shared supported accommodation. For the last financial year he paid \$2880 for rent. When the proposed rise to the residential charge comes into effect, he will pay \$12,200. It is no wonder that the Department of Human Services refuses to disclose what the rent component of the new residential charge will be.

He will be left with 25 per cent of his pension to cover his personal spending needs, his medical, dental and pharmaceutical needs and the cost of his day placement. He will not be able to meet all these needs and his lifestyle will be dramatically altered. The response of the DHS has been to say that he can claim under the undue hardship rules. That he will suffer from undue hardship is because of the DHS. If he is granted Undue Hardship, the DHS will simply give back to him what it took away.

P. Mountford, South Kingsville

Rent rise shocks

WHAT a disgrace that the Government is raising rents in shared accommodation for the disabled to 75 per cent of their income.

My daughter lived in a DHS-owned facility for 12 months and I am aware of the costs involved.

Her disability pension barely covered their costs, her day program fees, spending, clothing money, and any extras. I frequently had to give her extra cash.

Judy Lockton, Kensington

User pays if fair

Susie O'Brien's article ("Rent Appeal, HS, 7/8) omitted a number of facts relating to the change to board and lodging charges for disability-supported accommodation managed by the Department of Human Services.

The new standardised charge will ensure residents make a contribution to the very significant cost of their accommodation, food, utilities, personal care and daily activities.

Each resident's situation is considered in applying the charge. If a resident believes they will find it hard to meet reasonable living expenses they can apply for relief under DHS guidelines.

1

Every cent raised through the new board and lodging charge will help fund support for 720 people with complex needs who are desperately waiting for services.

Mary Wooldridge, Victorian Minister for Disability Services and Reform.

LISA Comment: The Minister says that residents should make a contribution to their, "*accommodation, food, utilities, personal care and daily activities*". Well, they already pay for these, their daily living costs, and have done so for years. So let the Minister show how and why she considers residents are not paying their daily living costs and suddenly need to pay 50% more.

What residents do not contribute to is their support service costs (staff wages and associated overheads). There has never been an intention they shall - this would be a punishment for having a disability and needing support to live.

It is the intention of the NDIS/DCA to eventually replace the state government block support service funding for each resident, with an ISP for each resident to continue to receive a similar intended level of support.

The difference being, that each resident would have the financial ability to move to a different group home service provider or, as a group, have a different service provider in their home to fulfil their service contract.

This potential level of choice and control would be totally lost with the second negative impact of the Minister's intended cost hike – the aged-care style block residential charge.

The block residential charge, being called a '*board and lodging fee*' rather than the present, under the act, '*residential charge and services component*', will completely remove the residents' moral human right to have real residential tenancy rights providing them similar control of their home as other members of the general community.

The Minister demonstrates having little or no conscience in her determination to take unjustified money from very vulnerable people, most of whom have no other income than their disability support pension, to prop-up state coffers. Pensioners in the general community would not tolerate their pension being grabbed to pay for other government services. There would be a public outcry!

A further demonstration of government insulting people with disabilities, is the blasé attitude of the Minister in saying that if you can justify beyond reasonable doubt our unjustified grab at your pension is causing you hardship, then you can beg for some of your money to be returned to you. Whereas most residents of group homes have so little in their lives with just what they currently have – any further reduction would be aged-care.

This cash-grab move to an aged-care style block-charge with beg-back is the tip of the iceberg. Everyone will eventually suffer this intuitional lockdown if it is not stopped in its tracks.

LIFESTYLE IN SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION (LISA) INC.

Tel: 03-9434-3810: Email: info@lisainc.com.au or vk3qq@optusnet.com.au

Web: www.lisainc.com.au : www.lisa-aus.blogspot.com

NOTE: We are always interested in feedback and information; general, specific, good or bad.

If you wish anonymously: Our mail address is, 73 Nepean Street, Watsonia, 3087