

“The ‘Them and Us’ should not be ...”

Due to state government control, it is currently not possible for residents of group homes in Victoria to easily move from one service to another. If this was possible, residents moving from government to non-government group homes would be seriously disadvantaged financially.

Group homes in Victoria, since time immemorial, have been almost equally divided between the Department of Human Services and Community Service Organisations, but with little financial equality between the residents of the two groups.

The inequality is mainly as a direct result of the department fully funding its own resident's support service costs (support staff wages and associated overheads), but not fully funding the residents of CSOs. Consequently, CSOs are forced to charge their residents more, fund raise or use less support staff - or a combination thereof.

One of the main selling points the department used for deinstitutionalisation, was that people would be relocated into houses in the general community, where their living style would be close to that of the general community – especially their daily living costs, procedures and accounting. The very fair and accountable CERS (Client Expenditure Recording System) was introduced in the late 90s, where resident's pay their actual daily living costs like the general community.

The CSO were mainly left to their own devices, but were given a ceiling and green light to block-charge their residents through department sanctioned legislation in the Disability Act 2006 and Regulations 2007. The ‘residential charge’, the ‘services component’ and ‘regulation 5’ provide authority for all residents of group homes in Victoria to be ‘block-charged’ up to a maximum of 75% of their DSP (Disability Support Pension) and 100% of their federal rent assistance. This is 50% more than DHS residents pay under CERS!

The National Disability Services (NDS) is currently surveying its members (CSOs) to ascertain just what they are charging their residents, and why. The recent failed attempt by the state government to scrap CERS, and bring DHS residents under the Disability Act's residential charge, was very dramatically demonstrated before a VCAT judge to financially move young people with disabilities towards aged-care limitations and hardship.

If it was seen that DHS residents would be seriously disadvantaged by residential charges under the Disability Act 2006, then the residents of CSOs are being seriously disadvantaged. Therefore we ask, why all residents of group homes throughout Victoria are not on the CERS.

The original intention of the NDIS was that no person with a lifelong disability shall be expected to pay any part of their support service cost. Their only responsibility should be for their daily living costs, as is currently the case for the residents of most DHS group homes.

Although the NDIS is surveying its members, service providers, to give an insight into their charges, we suspect most CSOs will be reluctant to disseminate their residential charges.

We, therefore, ask administrators of CSO residents to let us know what they are paying each month, and if they are getting a breakdown of these charges... Covert responses can be made to our mail address below.

One of the main intentions of the original NDIS concept was, choice. Choice to move service providers. Since time immemorial, the DHS have had despotic control of the residents of all group homes throughout the state, through the DSP (Disability Support Register) which has total control over all placements funded by the department.

Whenever the NDIS is able to free-up this shocking situation, a resident moving from the DHS to a CSO should not have to pay increased charges. Current DHS charges under the CERS system are fair, and CSO charges should be similar... Not the aged care style of the Disability Act 2006 and its Regulations in respect to residential charges!

It is, however, disappointing that the NDIS/DCA may never fully fund the support services of residents in group homes, both DHS and CSO, throughout Victoria. They are currently placing this in their too hard basket.

In respect to support service costs of around \$120,000pa (\$10,000pm) per resident living in a DHS group home, as compared to the cost of residents living in village settings in the USA. The Sweetwater Centre in California is just one example. The cost per resident is around \$3,500AUDpm. Therefore, for around a third of the cost of living in a group home in Australia, a person can live in the Sweetwater Centre – compare the difference with this [LINK](#)

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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.