

The two headed state government viper is slowly showing its more ugly sides!

- **Unjustified Cost Hike!**
- **Fixed Fee Charge!**
- **No Real Residential Tenancy Rights!**

There was a determination when the majority of institutions were finally replaced with group homes in the community, that the residents of these should live as closely as possible to the way people in the general community live – paying their way and having real residential tenancy rights like the general community. Not paying a fixed fee like they were living in aged-care, institutions or hostels!

The CERS (Client Expenditure Recording System) has, since its inception, achieved an extremely accountable and transparent actual costs payment process for most residents of DHS group homes.

Whereas, the ‘fixed-fee charge’ system which the state government, through its DHS pawnbroker, is attempting to force on the residents of its group homes, is a very retrograde step in moving the group homes from being a ‘home’ to being ‘hostels’ – aged-care facilities. And, with no real residential tenancy rights with which to determine which support staff work in their home.

The other ugly head is the department’s dash-for-cash, raising their take from a person’s DSP to 75% - a rise in overall cost of 50%. And, not one cent of this cost rise being justified – apart from a department claim of existing residents contributing to the service cost of proposed new services.

There is, however, a third ugly side - a hidden ugly side to this sad-saga. This is that the whole dirty tricks brigade now includes the DCA (DisabilityCare Australia). Their agenda for when they take-over the funding of group homes through ISPs is to keep group home service fees as low as possible, make these standard across the country and easy to increase (see Q5/A5 below).

The original intention of the NDIS was that of, (a) reducing or eliminating the waiting list for services including group homes) and, (b) making all services ‘entitlement’ and fully support service funded through ISP style funding, in contrast to the traditional ‘charity hand-out’ style services resulting from block funding.

There was never an intention to reduce the level and quality of existing services, or increase their cost to the consumer. Yet this has recently become the intention for those currently living in department group homes, and for those wishing to do so.

The original intention of the NDIS was not to reduce existing services to the lowest common denominator, but provide all people with disabilities, with quality of life services in accordance with their needs and wishes.

There are three basic areas of residential care, DHS group homes, CSO Group homes and living with one's family. Since time immemorial, the inequality between the groups has been outrageous – a direct result of bureaucracy.

The intention of the real NDIS is to eliminate the inequality, with the first priority being to reduce or eliminate the waiting list for services, especially supported accommodation services. The second priority is to have ISP support service funding drive support services towards consumer having a real entitlement to services.

Everyone should support residents and their families fend-off the demand of the DHS for their totally unjustified cost hike, attempting to move living costs from 'actual-cost' to 'fixed-fee charges'. If the DHS get away with this outrageous and unjustified cost hike and fixed-fee charges everyone will eventually lose.

The fight needs to continue until everyone who wants/needs a group home has one, and that all group home service providers have similar support and cost criteria. Meaning that if a resident were to move from a DHS group home to a CSO group home, the costs and service would be similar.

The current overall cost for residents of DHS group home are, we consider, fair and reasonable. These should be a bench-mark for all group homes. There are two costs, the 'support service fee', and the 'living cost'.

The support service fee is that needed to fund the level of care and support the resident is assessed to need and desire, with this funding being provided from government sources. The cost of living is born by the resident - being rent, housekeeping and personal expenditure.

Currently, the DHS service fee (staff wages and overheads) for each resident of their group home is, on average, around \$130,000 per resident, per annum (fully funded). The cost of living (actual) for each resident works out to be around 50% of their DSP, and has been so for many years.

All services should be fully funded for care and support (support staff wages and overheads) from government sources, state or federal, and residents should pay just actual living costs. Whereas, the DHS, in covert cooperation with the DCA, are attempting to set a nation-wide benchmark of a fixed living cost fee to include a contribution to the service fee – similar to aged-care.

Their intention is to get 75% of the person's DSP as a fixed charge with no accountability or justification. This being, +50% on what residents currently pay.

Finally, moving to the aged-care model of a fixed-fee charge brings on another ugly side where the residents of group homes are totally blocked from having real residential tenancy rights where they then can determine their support staff and service contract. This is the real choice they are entitled too, and should have!

DHS Response to VCAT Questions – 26 July 2013

Q1. Is the residential charge a charge of 75% of the total disability pension, or 75% of the pension amount that is paid to a resident?

A1. The residential charge will be an amount equal to the sum of 75% of the Commonwealth disability support pension and 100% of Commonwealth rent assistance (CRA).

In relation to the figure of 75% of the Commonwealth disability support pension, that part of the residential charge will be the amount in fact received by the person to whom the proposed residential charge relates. The charge does not include other income such as the pension supplement, clean energy supplement, mobility allowance or any other income received by an individual.

Q2. What happens if a resident does not apply for CRA?

A2. If a resident or the resident's administrator does not apply for CRA for the resident, the resident will nonetheless be required to pay, as a component of the residential charge, an amount equivalent to 100% of the amount of CRA for which he or she is eligible.

The department is working with Centrelink to streamline the CRA application process. Whilst this is still being negotiated, it is proposed the department would directly provide Centrelink with the information it requires to assess residents for CRA eligibility. The department would require consent of administrators and will consult with them about CRA applications and provide them the opportunity to opt out of this process if they desire.

Q3. Assuming a resident is eligible for CRA, will the resident be charged the full amount, or the amount of the portion they actually receive?

A3. The residential charge will include 100% of the amount of CRA for which the resident is eligible, as explained above in the answer to Question 2. If an individual is not eligible for any amount of CRA, this component of the residential charge will be zero.

Q4. What components will be part of the residential charge?

A4. The residential charge will include: rent utilities communications including telephone food general household consumable supplies communal furnishings and whitegoods household equipment and utensils bedding and linen replacement of the above following wear and tear or accidental damage.

Q5. Will residents be advised of the dollar or percentage amount of each component that is part of the residential charge?

A5. Residents will not be advised of the dollar or percentage of each component that is part of the residential charge. Rather, they will be advised of the dollar amount of the total residential charge, as explained in the answer to Question 6, below. This is consistent with other board and lodging fee models (both in Victoria and interstate).

For the purpose of applying for CRA, where the rent component of a board and lodging fee charge is not specified, Centrelink will accept two-thirds of the amount paid to be the rent portion (reference: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/rent-assistance>).

Q6. When will residents be advised of the dollar amount of their residential charge?

A6. Residents will be notified of the dollar amount of their residential charge by the end of September 2013; such notices will be consistent with the 60 day notice period required by the Disability Act 2006 (Vic).

Extra 1: [The 'A' Team](#)

Extra 2: [Yooralla Group Home in Crisis](#) – The Age, July 29, 2013

Extra 3: [“It’s the system which decides!”](#) – The BBC, July 24, 2013

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