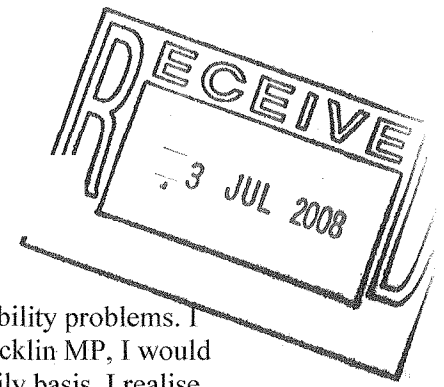


ABC 21/7/08

Submission No. 964

(Inq into better support for carers)

29/6/08



Committee Chair, Ms. Annette Ellis,

I am a carer for my wife who is blind, an elliptic and has mobility problems. I receive a carers allowance. After communication with the Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, I would like your committee to be aware of some problems I face on an almost daily basis. I realise the time constraints of your work so I will list some of the more important concerns with a brief explanation.

A. Cost of medical prescriptions.

Carers are acutely aware of the costs of pharmaceuticals at the family level and can understand the Government's budgetary concerns with the PBS. We are at times faced with the medication of choice from our doctor not being on the PBS and so make an economic choice on which medications to purchase. This creates a double economic burden as these non-PBS medications even though available only on a doctor's prescription do not count towards the PBS safety net cohort.

Secondly, a number of medications formally available through the PBS are no longer covered but available over the counter at the normal retail cost.

Thirdly, the broader spectrum of subsidised medications available to our returned servicemen and not to the general public.

And finally, a new cost we saw for the first time last week. A prescription requiring "authority" given PBS approval but SPX disapproved. At this time this appears to be a surcharge.

B. Pensions.

My wife receives a disability (blind) pension. If she was forced to live on this income only she would struggle, have a lower standard of living and be forced to sell the family home. I realise the Government has a review of pensions in motion, it is a shame she will have to wait until possible next year for any outcomes. Further more, my wife received the single pension rate up to a few years ago. Social Security considered this an anomaly and she reverted back to the married rate. While this amounted to only a few dollars, every dollar counts.

I am concerned that if I predecease my wife she will have major economic problems.

C. Carers Bonus.

In our case, this grant will be used up to reduce our debts. This payment needs to be set in legislation (and indexed) to prevent any indecision on its future.

D. Short Term Help.

A persistent problem is if my wife has some minor accident at home, eg, breaks a glass in the kitchen. She is unable to clean up the broken glass and so is forced to vacate that part of the house until I can come home. I have raised this concern with the Community Health people but they are not set up for this type of incident.

E. Mobility Allowance.

We are grateful for this allowance but this needs to be increased. My wife had the unfortunate experience of being the victim of an assault and robbery after train travel. She is now very hesitant to use public transport and so I drive her most places. With the rapidly increasing fuel prices, vehicle trips are questioned on economic grounds in conjunction with absolute requirements. A further concern which may appear insignificant to many but gives my wife great pleasure. As with many blind people, other senses are finely tuned. She enjoys going to the beach or botanical gardens early in the morning before the rush of the community to hear the sounds of nature, smell the aroma and feel the wind on her face. She now questions these small trips as being too extravagant.

F. Rebates.

Both the Federal and State Governments are generous in providing rebates. The two which I have utilised in recent times are the Water Wise and LPG vehicle conversion schemes. The problem arises in that we pay the full amount and then apply for the grant on presentation of receipts. For the economically depressed, this is either not an option or as in our case we took out a personal bank loan. The availability of low interest loans from the Government could be a solution.

G.

Superannuation.

Finally, allow super contributions by pensioners without any of the restrictions now enforced.

I hope this inquiry will formulate a blue print on which the Government can make better policies for carers and their dependants.

Yours sincerely

P.N.