

Community Budget Broadcast 2005-06 Q&As

Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessment

Question:

What reassurances can the Government give to people with disability that the Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessment process will be fair, accurate and transparent?

Answer:

The Department of Human Services who are responsible for new Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessments arrangements are committed to realising the Government's intention to establish an assessment process that is customer focused and provides for quicker access to additional support from service providers.

Question:

What role do doctor's play in the new assessment process?

Answer:

The roles of doctors and other health professionals in the new assessment process have not been determined.

Question:

What input will agencies have in the new assessment of people post 1 July 2006? (Currently, we can complete the professionals report if no other suitable can be found.)

Answer:

The new work capacity assessment arrangements are still being developed at the moment and so a definite response regarding what input any specific organisations will have is yet to be determined.

We are awaiting the evaluation of some pilots testing new assessment arrangements currently around Australia. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is managing these trials.

The evaluation of these trials will assist in determining exactly which services will be contracted out under the new arrangements.

The emphasis will be to implement a more streamlined and efficient assessment process that links customers in to the recommended service for them as soon as possible.

Centrelink Staffing levels

Question:

Do you envisage an increase of staffing levels to cope with increased need for case management (Centrelink) in regional areas, for welfare to work?

Answer:

Case Management services may be available to some customers who will be serving an eight week non-payment period as a result of:

- three participation failures within a 12 month period without a reasonable excuse
- failure to accept an offer of employment
- voluntary unemployment or dismissal due to misconduct; or
- any participation failure in a full time Work for the Dole program

Case management will be limited to cases where there may be potential third party impacts on children or partners, where the customer has an ongoing medical condition requiring treatment or medication or where the customer is regarded as being 'at risk'.

We expect that there will be a number of staff, in a range of positions, involved in the case management process to support customers through a period of non-payment and to assist them to meet their obligations during and after the non-payment period.

Details about how the case management process will work are still to be determined and Centrelink will continue to provide staff with information as it becomes available.

Centrelink Letters

Question:

Can Centrelink advice letters show, on the front: "your payment will be \$xxx based on the fact that last fortnight you earned \$xxx.

Answer:

During the period leading up to 1 July 2006, when the Welfare to Work initiatives will commence, Centrelink will review all existing letters sent to customers with participation obligations. Letters will be redesigned, where necessary, to ensure they clearly set out the reasons for a decision.

Background: (as received from community organisation)

This would give the NSA/YA person an indication of what earnings are being taken into account. At the moment those letters show the payment is based on the annual deemed earnings of your bank account. It is very hard to detect an error if Centrelink have recorded earnings wrongly.

JET program administration

Question:

How will Centrelink administer the JET program? What is the transition process?

Answer:

The processing of JET childcare will be done by Centrelink, rather than the current process of referring customers to FaCS state JETCCRW officers. The way Centrelink will administer JET childcare is still being developed and is subject to legislation and policy.

Child Care – Access and affordability of care

Question:

Are the Australian Government planning any strategies to assist families needing care for children under two years both in relation to access and affordability?

Answer:

There has been a 14 per cent increase in the number of babies and toddlers in formal care since the introduction of CCB by the Howard Government in 2000. Over 180,000 children aged 0-2 (or around 25 per cent of the 0-2 year old population) used approved child care in the September 2004 quarter.

The Australian Government does not restrict the number of new long day care centres that can be established. Any service meeting state and local government requirements can apply to offer CCB-approved child care places to parents, including places for 0-2 year olds. When prospective long day care services contact the department for information, they are given local area information on known places and demographic information, and are encouraged to provide care for children in the 0-2 age group.

The Government is also encouraging services to provide more baby care through the Long Day Care Incentive Scheme, and by expanding Family Day Care and In-Home Care.

The Long Day Care Incentive Scheme encourages places for children under two years by providing more funding to services for that age group.

Under the 2005-06 Budget measures, an additional 2,500 Family Day Care and 1,000 In-Home Care places will be established over the next four years.

As with all forms of formal care, the Government provides significant assistance with the cost of care through Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Tax Rebate.

Question:

How is the Minister going to ensure childcare remains affordable for families given the landmark wage increase handed down by the AIRC?

Answer:

The Australian Government expects to spend around \$9 billion over the next four years to support parents access to quality child care.

The Government provides assistance to parents with the cost of child care through Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR).

CCB increases in line with the consumer price index (CPI) annually. As a rebate on out of pocket child care expenditure, CCTR in effect rises with fees, up to the limit of rebate of \$4,000 per child per year.

Child Care – Outside School Hours Care

Question:

Could you explain how you anticipate the sector being able to staff the additional out of school hours places given the current shortages?

Answer:

There will be a staged rollout of the extra 84,300 OSHC places over the next four years. Some of the extra places will be in new services, some in existing services.

The sector has already demonstrated its capacity to respond to rapidly growing numbers over a period of many years.

- There were 72,000 Outside School Hours Care places in 1996, now over 270,000 – a 275% increase.

Training of child care workers is also a high priority. As part of the proposed agreement between the Australian Government and the states and territories for Skilling Australia's Workforce, additional funding was provided in the 2005 Budget for vocational, education and training places in skills shortage areas such as child care.

Child Care – Planning issues

Question:

Oversupply and undersupply are issues arising due to the fact that no planning exists for long day care. Are measures going to be put in place to address the Government's role in this?

Answer:

The Australian Government does not place any limits on the number of long day care places or services that can be established.

All levels of government play a part in supporting parents to access high quality child care. The Australian Government's focus is on assisting parents with the cost of child care, through the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Tax Rebate. State governments play a major role in the child care sector, through planning, regulation and policies that facilitate access and affordability. Local governments can also play a vital role in supporting child care provision, and many are actively involved in responding to the specific needs of families for child care in their local areas.

Child Care – Staffing shortages

Question:

No measures were given on assisting with the training and retention of staff in the long day care sector. What role will the Minister take in this issue which has the potential to lower quality outcomes for children?

Answer:

The Australian Government is working with the State and Territory governments on the Children's Services Workforce Planning Project. The project is investigating strategies for attracting and retaining qualified staff to the child care profession and improving workforce planning.

Childcare Benefits – Staff wage increase

Question:

Is the Government going to increase the childcare benefits to cover wage increases in the industry?

Answer:

- The Howard Government provides unprecedented assistance to parents with the costs of child care.
- Quality child care comes at a certain cost, and our substantial fee subsidies will continue to assist parents with the cost of quality care.
- \$1.5 billion dollars a year in Child Care Benefit and over \$1 billion dollars extra over the first four years for the Child Care Tax Rebate will continue to support parents in their child care choices.

Background:

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) released its final decision on 10 May 2005 regarding the Child Care Industry (ACT) Award 1998 and Children's Services (Victoria) Award 1998 to provide increases of up to \$20 per week at six monthly intervals from 1 July 2005 to 1 January 2007.

Funding for CCB has always been indexed by CPI, and has never been linked to wage rises. As the Child Care Tax Rebate is based on the out of pocket fees that parents pay, any fee increases will be partially met with the 30 per cent rebate.

Child Care – Specialist support for sole parents

Question:

Will there be specialist childcare offered to sole parents (when working for sole parent pension)?

Answer:

- The parents of all children, including those receiving Parenting Payment Single, have access to child care services.
- The Australian Government supports these child care services to provide quality care to all children including those children who need specialist care.
- We have the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme that provides funding to child care services approved for Child Care Benefit for additional staffing, advice, resources, training and equipment to assist the services in including children with special needs.
- The Supplementary Services Program funds agencies to provide support, training and resources to increase access and participation of children with additional needs and facilitate appropriate programs for them.
- Additionally, for children attending Child Care Benefit approved family day care and in-home services, there is the Disabled Supplementary Services Program that provides an extra payment to carers for the care of children with additional needs.

Explanatory:

Specialist child care relates to the needs of children with Autism, ADHD, ADP, learning disabilities, behavioural disabilities, etc.

A new Inclusion Support Subsidy will be implemented on 1 July 2006. The Inclusion Support Subsidy streamlines administration replacing the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme and the Disabled Supplementary Services payment, with one program and

payment, irrespective of the service type the family chooses. No support for children with additional needs will be removed as a result of this change.

Child Care – Remuneration

Question:

Why is childcare such a low paid profession? When we are responsible for caring for the next generation's children and future leaders of this country. I trained staff person to 20 children – may be this is why the transition to school rates are poor?

Answer:

It is the role of the Federal and State Industrial Relations Commissions to make decisions on wages. Child care workers may use the flexibility within the *Workplace Relations Act 1996 (Commonwealth)* to negotiate on pay and conditions outside of the Award provisions.

The ratio of child care workers to children is regulated by the State and Territory governments and it may differ across jurisdictions.

Women's Safety – Centrelink debts

Question:

What is being done to assist women who incur debt to Centrelink as a result of the financial abuse they experience from a violent partner / ex-partner?

Answer:

There is a range of provisions under the Social Security Act 2001 that allows debts to be waived or written off depending on the circumstances of the case. Under the special circumstances provision, a debt may be waived if a customer incurs a debt, the debtor did not incur the debt knowingly, and there are special circumstances besides financial hardship. Centrelink will consider each case on its merits.

Women's Safety - Supporting Parent Benefits

Question:

I work in a Domestic Violence Service. Most of the women and children I work with are victims of abuse. For them to remain in the family home with the alleged perpetrator leaves them in considerable danger. They do not have the ability to draw on their assets. They cannot take out a loan on their share of the property. I very rarely obtain exclusive occupancy to that house on their behalf, as the Family Court rarely grants that request.

Please tell me how I am to assist those families?

Answer:

- I understand that for women and children living with domestic violence, life can become very hard.
- The Australian Government does recognise this, and has committed \$75.7 million to a new Women's Safety Agenda, building on the previous achievements of the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative and the *National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault*.

- For the past eight years, the Australian Government has taken a leading role in eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault in the community.
- We have been working with the States and Territories to research good practice in these areas, and established the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, so that workers in the sector can be updated with good practice.
- The Australian Government has commissioned research on ways of improving women's safety, including examining ways of helping women and children to stay in the home through the use of exclusion orders.
- However these kinds of solutions are the responsibility of the States and Territories, through policing, support services and provision of emergency accommodation.
- The Government is also committed to improving outcomes for separating families, particularly children.
- Reflecting this commitment in the 2005-06 Budget the Government announced the most significant reforms to the family law system in 30 years.
- The package includes a new network of 65 Family Relationship Centres which will provide information and referral services and act as a point of entry to the family law system. They will also provide advice on the family law system and help parents reach agreement on parenting arrangements after family separation.
- These reforms recognise that family violence and child abuse cannot be tolerated. Although these are primarily criminal offences and a matter for State and Territory Governments, the family law system has an important part to play in its prevention, particularly in respect of the welfare of children.
- Screening for violence and child abuse will be a very important role of the Family Relationship Centres and the centres will also be able to provide information and advice to victims of family violence about their options and about support services available.
- In cases of family violence and child abuse, a parent will not be required to attend a dispute resolution session.

The package also includes over \$7 million to enhance the delivery of specialised family violence services.

Women's Safety - Supporting Parent Benefits

Question:

I feel the Commonwealth Government has no idea of the problems facing victims of domestic violence. Best Practice is for the women and children to be granted exclusive occupation of the family home until the property settlement is finalised. The next option is to go into a Refuge for Victims of Domestic Violence. That option

is not always available as the refuges are often full. The only other alternative is to access private rental. That is not possible unless the woman has some form of income. I and many others need to understand this rule?

Answer:

- The Australian Government is aware of the range and complexity of issues facing victims of domestic violence, from talking about and identifying that they are victims of abuse, to formally reporting the abuse, accessing support and dealing with the ongoing health repercussions of being in a violent relationship.
- We have worked and will continue to work closely with the States and Territories, through the Women's Ministers, to ensure victims of domestic violence get the best advice and support.
- The Australian Government takes the issue of homelessness very seriously.
- It is also serious about its responsibility to work cooperatively with state and territory governments to provide services for marginalised people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
- Victims of violence who are at risk of homelessness seek housing assistance from a wide range of sources. These include SAAP services, public and community housing, State and Territory government funded homelessness refuges, the private rental market, community organisations and friends and family.
- SAAP is the Australian Government's major response to homelessness, which is jointly funded between the Australian Government and state and territory governments. Under the SAAP Agreement, funding decisions relating to SAAP services are the responsibility of the State and Territory Governments.
- Through SAAP, the Australian Government is continuing to assist women and children escaping domestic and family violence, with 20 per cent of all SAAP clients in 2003–04 citing this as their main reason for seeking help. In 2003–04 the Australian Government contributed more than \$47 million towards SAAP domestic violence crisis accommodation and support services.

Family day care – setting up

Question:

Please clarify who will be able to apply for the \$1500 grant to support setting up family day care and how do they apply?

Answer:

- The guidelines for the payment to assist setting up family day care are still being developed. Details of the new payment will be available in the new year.

Explanatory:

This measure provides minor capital occupational health and safety grants to new Family Day Care workers. The payments will act to reduce the upfront cost disincentive to potential workers and increase the supply of child care.

There will be \$1,500 grants to 600 Family Day Care Workers in each of the three years. The first allocation will occur in the first half of 2006.

Family Relationship Centres

Question:

When will family relationship centers be rolled out? What will they look like?

Answer:

Family Relationship Centres are a front door into the family law system. They will assist parents to reach agreement on arrangements for children after separation and will also be a point of referral and information for other families seeking assistance (whether or not they are separated). The national network of Family Relationship Centres will be supported by a web-site and a national telephone information and advice line.

The locations for the 65 Family Relationship Centres have not yet been determined nor the locations of other services which the Government has announced to help respond to family violence. It is anticipated that announcements about the first 15 Family Relationship Centres will be made over the next few months and these will be established in the 2006-07 financial year. The remainder will be established over the following two years.

Family Relationship Centres

Question:

How will you ensure that women experiencing family / domestic violence will not be diverted to the new 'family relationship centres', understanding that mediation is completely inappropriate where there is violence in a relationship?

Answer:

Under the proposed changes to the new family law system, mediation will not be compulsory in situations where family violence and child abuse have been identified.

Where families attend a Family Relationship Centre, the centre will screen for family violence and child abuse. Where such issues are identified, the centres will be able to provide information on options, support and refer families at risk of violence to specialized services and the courts where appropriate.

Family Relationship Centres

Question:

How do you see Family Relationship Centres dovetailing within the community? Will it be through existing family and relationship services providers, such as INTERRELATE (who have had 35 years experience in providing relationship services to the community) or through government agencies?

Answer:

A variety of organisations will be able to submit tenders to operate Family Relationship Centres. It is expected that existing community organisations with experience in the provision of family relationship service will be well placed to submit a tender.

Regardless of the outcome of any tender process Family Relationship Centres will be required to work collaboratively with the network of other service providers in the community to provide referral points and an integrated service that best meets the needs of individual families.

Family Relationship Centres

Question:

Has it been decided where the first roll out of these centres will occur? If so, is the Sunshine Coast earmarked for one?

Answer:

- A decision on the location of the Family Relationship Centres has not yet been made.
- My department will be working with the Attorney-General's Department to determine where these services will be located.
- The first 15 Family Relationship Centres will be rolled out in the 2006-07 financial year.

Homeless

Question: What funding is available in the form of grants to help homeless accommodation?

Answer:

- Support services, including emergency and transitional accommodation, needed by people who are homeless are provided by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP is jointly funded by the Australian and State/Territory Governments, with the Australian Government committed to providing \$932 million over the next five years.
- Provision of accommodation for people who are homeless is primarily the responsibility of the state and territory governments.
- To assist the states and territories to provide and maintain the physical infrastructure (this is, the buildings) the Australian Government is providing \$203 million under the Crisis Accommodation Program. The majority of these funds are used to purchase, construct, renovate, maintain and lease dwellings for crisis accommodation services.

Homeless

Question: What help is available to assist clients with Centrelink / rental assistance issues?

Answer:

- As part of the broad welfare housing policy agenda to assist low and moderate income households to access appropriate affordable housing, the Australian Government provides Rent Assistance to eligible Centrelink and Family Assistance Office customers.
- Rent Assistance is an additional payment in recognition of the relatively higher costs faced by private renters and contributes significantly to the improvement of housing affordability outcomes for low income individuals and households.
- It complements other Government housing support programmes, such as the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, and is an important pathway to housing independence for homeless and other vulnerable customers.
- Rent Assistance outlays are currently around \$2 billion per year, assisting over one million Australians.

Homeless - SAAP V Agreement

Question: The SAAP IV Agreement recommended the sustainability of SAAP required 15 per cent injection of funds. How is this being addressed in SAAP V Agreement?

Answer:

- I am committed to ensuring the SAAP Sector is adequately resourced and able to deliver better outcomes for SAAP Clients.
- The Australian Government is maintaining its funding commitment to SAAP over the next five years to assist the state and territory governments in meeting their responsibilities in addressing homelessness.
- The Australian Government wants states and territories to increase their SAAP contribution to a more equitable share of program funding, closer to 50:50 rather than the current 60:40.
- This additional investment from the states and territories, on top of the already significant contribution from the Australian Government, will create a funding package of around \$1.7 billion for ongoing continuity and certainty for the SAAP sector in assisting people experiencing homelessness.
- Supplementing this additional money, I have proposed a more strategic approach for SAAP V to the issues of unmet demand, service viability and better outcomes for clients.
- I have also proposed an Innovation and Investment Fund for SAAP V, which will further progress reform in the sector with a view to easing unmet demand and delivering better outcomes for families and children.

Homeless – Youth

Question:

Within the context of the National Homelessness Strategy, what provision is there specifically for young people? As there is currently a felt need for further support options for young people – particularly accommodation and counselling.

Answer:

The National Homelessness Strategy (NHS) brings together targeted and non-targeted homelessness programmes including programmes aimed at assisting young people who are homelessness or at risk of homelessness to stabilise their lives (for example, Reconnect, JPET and Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth).

A key activity of the NHS is the funding of Demonstration Projects to identify and promote integrated prevention and early intervention models to address homelessness. During the period July 2001 to June 2005, 10 of the 37 Demonstration Projects funded under the NHS were for projects specifically targeted to young people with an additional seven projects targeted to assisting families. The NHS from 2005 will expand on the learnings from these projects to develop new and innovative ways to prevent and respond to homelessness.

Family Law System – Community Consultation

Question:

Please advise how we become informed about the ‘roll out’ of initiatives such as ‘a new family law system’? Is it possible for interested organizations to:

- register their interest in being kept up to date?
- receive timely and comprehensive advice from the Government as to the roll out of funding?

The current system of watching the papers for tenders is ad hoc and unsatisfactory.

Answer:

Information about existing Family Relationship Services Programme service providers can be accessed from the FaCS Website at

http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/family/frsp-family_relationships_service_program.htm

Updates on the Family Law System can be accessed at Family Law Online at

<http://www.familylaw.gov.au/accesspoint/>

It is expected that the first 15 Family Relationship Centres will be established in the 2006-07 financial year and the remainder implemented over the following two years. Tender processes for these services will be conducted during the 2005-2006 financial year.

Pension – Age

Question:

How come that so many old age pensioners as distinct from engineered or designer pensioners through skilful tax minimization planning are so neglected in recent budgets, but billions of dollars are to be siphoned off to pay for the too highly subsidised pensions for public servants?

Those of us, after 40/50 years in private enterprises received only holiday pay and or seven days notice yet we helped pay for public servants pensions. When will we receive help? Below tax paying incomes, the GST is killing us financially. The tax savings plans are of no use to us.

Answer:

The Australian Government recognises and appreciates the valuable contribution of older Australians and announced additional assistance during the last election. The Government's election policy document "Recognising Senior Australians – Their Needs and Their Carers" announced that a new Utilities Allowance would be paid to people of age pension age on income support, including veterans.

The Utilities Allowance is a payment of \$100 per year to singles and \$100 per couple, indexed by the CPI, and payable in two instalments, one in March and one in September. The first instalment has already been paid in March.

Regular pension indexation is another benefit to aged pensioners, which is ongoing even though it is not specifically referred to in the annual budget. The pension continues to be adjusted twice each year in March and September in line with increases in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and increases in wages as measured by Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). As a result of MTAWE legislation, since March 1998 the single rate of pension has increased by \$44.30 a fortnight more than it would otherwise have done. The partnered rate of pension has increased by \$37.40 a fortnight more than it would otherwise have done.

Pension – Age

Question:

Pensioners on the flat rate with no extra income should have an increase of \$10 each per fortnight and the single ones under the same circumstances should receive \$15 per fortnight. (They are living below the poverty line) when will they receive an increase?

Answer:

The Government has introduced a new Utilities allowance for senior Australians who are in receipt of income support, a payment of \$100 a year to singles and \$100 a year per couple, indexed by the CPI, and payable in two instalments, one in March and one in September. The first instalment was paid in March 2005.

Age Pension payments, like other social security payments, are funded from current general taxation revenue. Because budgetary resources are limited and costs are ultimately borne by the taxpayer, the Government must give very careful consideration to the overall cost of income support programs. For example, the

Department of Family and Community Services estimates that a rise of just \$1 a week to current Age Pensioners would cost over \$97 million.

Our current Age Pension system is financially sustainable in the context of future challenges such as an ageing population and a smaller proportion of the population in the workforce and contributing taxes. In the current financial year, it is expected that payments of Age Pension will total \$20 billion.

Pensions are regularly indexed. They are adjusted twice each year in March and September in line with increases in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Government has also legislated that the single pension rate be set to at least 25 per cent of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). When the single pension rate increases, the partnered pension rate also increases. This legislation allows pensioners to share in improvements in community living standards as measured by wages. Because of this legislation, since March 1998, the single rate of pension has increased by \$44.30 a fortnight more than it would otherwise have done. The partnered rate of pension has increased by \$37.40 a fortnight more than it would otherwise have done.

Also, from July 2000, the Government delivered a permanent real increase to the pension with an extra two per cent increase over and above any usual pension rises that would have occurred over time.

Pension - Age

Question:

All essential services including council rates should have an increase in the rebates. There was a small increase this year but are now tied to cost of living and will increase each year. The pension does not cover the extra cost of the GST. (When will we receive an increase)?

Answer:

Centrelink issues a number of different types of concession cards, depending on the person's circumstances. The Australian Government's main purpose in issuing these cards is to provide access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme prescription items, and certain Medicare services, at a cheaper rate.

These concession cards are also used by state, territory and local governments and some private providers, to target a range of other discounts on services that they provide, to selected groups of people. The concession providers in many cases state and territory governments themselves decide what concessions will be made available, and who can receive them.

As part of the implementation of the New Tax System on 1 July 2000, pensions were increased by an additional two per cent on top of the twice-yearly increase provided for by regular indexation. Price increases that resulted from the introduction of the GST are reflected in the Consumer Price Index and therefore captured in pension indexation.

Support Services for Aged Carers of People with Disabilities

Question:

This year's Budget allocated nothing, it seems, to either respite services or accommodation support services. How does the Government intend to take leadership and contribute to the resolution of this shortfall and meet the need?

Answer:

- This year's Budget will provide \$317 million in one-off lump sum bonus payments to eligible carers who receive Carer Payment and/or Carer Allowance.
- The bonus payment recognises the many carers in our community, including those who are ageing and caring for their son or daughter with disabilities.
- This builds on the support provided to carers in the 2004-05 Budget package *Recognising the contribution of carers*, which provided an additional \$461 million to carers over five years.
- This includes \$72.5 million for respite care for older carers looking after their sons and daughters with disabilities. This funding is contingent on us reaching agreement with state and territory governments to match our funds. Negotiations with states and territories on this are progressing well.
- I am also expecting a report in July this year from a working group of the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference that will set out options to help ageing parents plan for the future accommodation and care of their children with disabilities.

Background:

In the 2004-05 Budget, the Government agreed to provide funding, when matched by the state and territory governments, for up to four weeks respite care to parents aged over 70 years caring for a son or daughter with a disability. Also, carers aged 65-69 who need to spend time in hospital will be eligible for up to two weeks respite care.

Agreement has been reached with Western Australia and South Australia. Victoria, Northern Territory and Tasmania have received an offer from me and agreement has been reached at the officer level. Agreement with the ACT is expected shortly. Negotiations are progressing with NSW however there has been no commitment on funding. At this stage negotiations are progressing with Queensland and I have received a response to my proposal.

As the Minister has acknowledged aged carers of people with disabilities are in great need of support services. This was recognised in last year's Budget with additional funding for respite services. Accommodation support services are also desperately needed for these aged carers, sons and daughters.

Supporting Parent Pension

Question:

Please explain how the specialised violence services will provide services? Where will they operate from?

Answer:

The Specialised Family Violence Service provides whole-of-family interventions using early intervention approaches that ensure the safety of women and children. Specialised Family Violence Services assist families by:

- removing the occurrence of family violence
- minimising the incidence, severity and impact of family violence;
- assisting clients to achieve and maintain positive family relationships;
- improving understanding of self and other family members in the context of family violence;
- increasing skills to minimise or eliminate family violence; and
- enhancing capacity to apply these understandings and skills.

Specialised Family Violence Services operate in all capital cities except for Hobart with two services in NSW.

The department is currently investigating the options regarding family violence services and it is anticipated that information regarding delivery of family violence services will be announced shortly.

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS)**Question:**

Will TIS be available to community-based services without fees? If not, will SAAP funding be increased so services can pay for TIS services.

Answer:

In 1998, the Ministerial Council for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs passed a resolution confirming the requirement for Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments to make provisions for interpreting services as part of their core funding for all community-based, not for profit organisations funded by them.

For the SAAP sector, the Australian Government agreed to maintain fee-free interpreting services for SAAP agencies until 30 June 2005 as a transitional arrangement. During negotiations of the SAAP V Agreement, State and Territory Governments (through the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee) have been reminded that they will need to make provisions for the funding of interpreting services for SAAP services in their jurisdiction.

Volunteer Support – Impact of Welfare to Work**Question:**

What strategies are in place to fill the human resource void left in welfare service delivery areas across Australia. As more people become employed, less people will be available to provide volunteer labour in the 5000,000 community organizations nationwide?

Answer:

The nature of the volunteer workforce is diverse, and it does not necessarily follow that as more people become employed, less people will be involved in volunteering. ABS statistics show that the number of volunteers is increasing nationally (ABS 1995, 2000).

The ABS Voluntary Work report 4441.0 (2000) also shows that people in paid employment, either full-time or part-time, were more likely to volunteer than those who were not in the labour force.

One of the many benefits of volunteering is the development of an individual's skills and ability to participate in the workforce. Volunteering plays a vital role in helping people to move from welfare to work. One of the reasons people give for volunteering is that it is seen to develop their skills and make them employable.

Once people have gained work, many continue to contribute to their community and enjoy the personal rewards that volunteering brings.

Volunteer

Question:

Funding is currently provided by both Department of FaCS and DEWR for volunteering. What commitment is there to volunteering in the future, by both Departments, bearing in mind the numerous & varied benefits to volunteers and community?

Answer:

Volunteering is an essential part of the Australian Government's objective to promote social participation and strengthen connections within communities. It benefits individuals and assists community organisations in their activities to support and benefit the community.

Support for volunteering is seen in the following FaCS programs:

- the **Volunteer Small Equipment Grants** program, an initiative developed and announced during the International Year of Volunteers in 2001. Since then there have been seven funding rounds. The program provides funding of up to \$3,000 to encourage and support volunteers, by enabling organisations to purchase small equipment that contributes to making volunteering activities easier, safer and more enjoyable. The Volunteer Small Equipment Grants (VSEG) help to build the ability of people and organisations to contribute and respond to issues in their local community. Funding for the grants comes from the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. During last year's election campaign, the Coalition committed to fund VSEG at \$3m a year for four years. The first round under that commitment was run earlier this calendar year.
- the **Volunteer Management Program** funds Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) to provide interview, matching and referral services to volunteers generally. There are currently 26 volunteer referral agencies. It is expected that the VMP will provide support for volunteering into the future.
- Since 2001 the Australian Government has funded the **National Volunteer Skills Centre**, which develops and adapts training for the voluntary sector, and disseminates it widely through the sector.