

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee

**Inquiry into the funding and operation of the Commonwealth
State/Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA)**

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to make the following submission to the Committee. Specifically, I wish to address the continuing failure of the Queensland government to fulfill its obligations under the CSTDA 2003-07 regarding the provision of supported accommodation for adults with an intellectual disability in the Toowoomba and Darling Downs region. This region has a rapidly increasing population of approximately 244,000 people – some 3 percent (7,300) of whom live with varying degrees of intellectual disability.

The CSTDA quite clearly established that;

- a. “accommodation support” is a “specialist service” and the responsibility of the States; and,
- b. the term “accommodation support” is defined as “providing” accommodation and furthermore, providing “support” for such accommodation.

(Tabs A, B and C refer).

Current Disability Services Queensland (DSQ) policy appears to rely solely upon periodic invitations to the private sector to “express interest” in:

- a. the provision of supported accommodation; after which,
- b. the provider may seek DSQ funding to engage the necessary support workers.

Such funding arrangements pre-suppose that the “bricks and mortar” are already in place and that buildings, re-furnished or otherwise, meet health and safety specifications.

This ad hoc arrangement has left this region bereft of supported accommodation for adults with intellectual disability whose family carers have either deceased or who can no longer continue in their caring role because of frailty and/or ill health. The Executive Summary of a collaborative research project between the Toowoomba Intellectual Disability Support Association (TIDSA) and the University of Southern Queensland (Enclosure 1) is clear evidence of the gravity and extent of a problem which has reached crisis level in this region. Previously, such a database of Unmet Accommodation Needs did not exist.

Where does the Funding Go ?

Without question, the level of disability funding in Queensland shows substantial increases over recent years (+ 20% in fiscal year 2006-07). However, it is acknowledged by government that, even with such catch-up increases, with the exception of Tasmania, Queensland per capita spending on the disability sector remains the lowest in Australia. This, despite the fact that the south east of the state records the fastest growing population increase in the country – 1500 per week and, it should be noted, 75 of these inter-state migrants will be living with a disability.

Examination of current and previous years Ministerial Portfolio Statements (Tabs D and E), reveals that the largest single item (as opposed to total multiple grants) of the DSQ budget is employee expenses. In May 2006, DSQ FOI/Policy division revealed that the department’s Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees totalled 2151. Lay this figure against employee expenses of \$139,384,000 (year 2005/6) and \$172,932,000 (year 2006/7) and the resulting average salary figures of \$64,799 and \$80,396 respectively, provide a fair, if simplistic, indication of where funding priorities lie.

At the other end of the spectrum – Capital Expenditure on Innovative Housing is a mere \$7,816,000, or 1.23 % of a total budget of \$634 million – even less than the \$8.9 million allocated for software upgrade ! It should also be noted that the Innovative Housing project (Tab E) is

intended to cater only for people with an intellectual disability with complex and harmful behaviour (e.g. those exiting the judicial system), and not as long term (over 12 months) accommodation.

Aging in Place

Regarding the aging/aging with a disability interface; aging is natural and inevitable – aging with a disability is not.

The Federal government's promotion of an "aging in place" policy (a euphuism for "dying at home") is probably perfectly acceptable to most senior citizens, where self care so allows. However, when that person is also a family carer, where does this leave the person with a disability ? (most especially, one without the cognitive reasoning and communication skills, either to continue living in the family home or to independantly seek alternative accommodation).

This presents a problem, doubly compounded in terms of human rights, moral obligation and, an ever increasing, financial cost to the community. Instead of a planned, well trialled, seamless transition from family to supported residential care, the death of a family carer becomes a crisis accommodation management case in this region and, quite possibly, throughout the nation.

A Solution

A preferred solution is to provide purpose designed, new build accommodations of sufficient scale to cater for current and projected numbers of aging people whose primary disability is intellectual. Economy of scale and funding dictates that some degree of centralised support facilities be embodied in such developments. **This should not be envisaged as a return to "institutionalisation"** – which is, of itself, an overworked and, often emotionally, misinterpreted word.

The DSQ Profile 2005 informs, that people with an intellectual disability comprise 63% of all supported residents; the next largest figure is 15% representing persons with a physciatric disorder. At best, these figures are only likely to remain stable and must be catered for.

Having established the scale and immediacy of the problem, TIDSA intends to produce conceptual and costed business plans for presentation to government by year's end 2006. The concept will be along the lines of

a multi-model village, possibly community inclusive and drawing on the experience of similar existing and planned accommodations, both nationally and overseas.

Collaborative Funding

Noting the current funding responsibilities, Federal (aged care) and State (disability), it appears fair and logical that some form of joint funding for the provision of accommodation should evolve when governments address the continuation of the current CSTDA (presumably before 30 June 2007).

Conclusion

It is not accepted that sufficient funding is not available to properly accommodate and care for persons with an intellectual disability who can no longer be cared for in the family home. **The contention is that ample funding exists but is mis-directed.** If necessary, Federal government should resume executive control of that GST funding which is nominated for specific capital expenditure projects, especially in the areas under discussion.

On behalf of TIDSA, I thank the Senators for their consideration and commend our findings and feelings to the committee's deliberations.

(Anthony J. Lanigan)
President TIDSA Inc.

30 July 2006

- Enclosures:
1. An Analysis of Accommodation Needs of Adults with an Intellectual Disability in Toowoomba and Surrounding Areas – Executive Summary.
 2. Three local print media articles (self explanatory)