

MID NORTH COAST AREA DISABILITY COMMITTEE

PO Box 496, Macksville NSW 2447

Telephone: (02) 6568 4040

Our Ref: 1437584

31 July 2006

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

SUBMISSION

To:

**The Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Inquiry into the Funding and Operation of the Commonwealth
State/Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA)**

From:

MID NORTH COAST AREA DISABILITY COMMITTEE (ADC)

**Subject: To Improve Disability Services in the Local Community Through the
Development of the Role of Local Government**

ADC comprises consumers, carers, service providers and others interested in disability in the Mid North Coast. It was established as an advisory committee to the Department of Community Services in 1993 but re-examined its role following change in government organisational structures in 1998 and is now autonomous.

The committee gives consideration primarily to area wide issues and relates to area organisational structures of government. It has established a close working relationship with local groups and local government in the area.

Terms of Reference of ADC

To advocate on behalf of and to seek to improve the health and well-being of individuals with an intellectual disability and/or physical or sensory disability, psychiatric disability or acquired brain injury who live in the Mid North Coast area.

This overriding commitment will involve the committee to:

- Seek to improve services for persons with disabilities and help coordinate these services.
- Act as a channel of communication linking people with disabilities with government and non government services.
- Advocate on quality issues for government and non government services delivered to persons with a disability.
- Advise government on the needs of people with a disability.
- Cooperate with government in the development of services and programs for persons with a disability (e.g., HACC, needs based planning, accommodation placement and respite, PSO: Area Practice Review).

ADC and Disability Services

The experience of ADC is that there is a major gap in the provision of services and a lack of information at the local community level where disability occurs.

In the context of CSTDA and programs of “shared responsibility”, governments appear to be concerned as much about cost shifting as with the development of complementary programmes. ADC has, for example, on many occasions discussed concerns over the administrations of post-school programs for young people.

Despite years of action involving copious submissions and correspondence and a major workshop held in 2004 (copy of report enclosed) there also remains no funded advocacy service for people with a disability in the whole of the Mid North Coast.

Local Government And Disability

In 2002 a Mayor of a Council in the Mid North Coast wrote:

“The role of local government is changing, we are still involved in roads, footpaths and rubbish but communities are more complex and the issues facing local Councils are broad reaching.”

In various ways and at differing levels local government is involved in disability. Most Councils have Access Committees and all have some function in the administration of concessions. Some Councils provide a measure of support to local disability organisations.

Most if not all Councils may apply for funding from HACC but subsidies are very small and vary between Councils. The tasks specified by fund providers are substantial leaving Councils to determine how to utilise grants. Invariably larger rural Councils with Community Service Branches contribute far more resources to helping people with a disability than they receive for this purpose.

A workshop on "Local Government and Disability" was held in the Mid North Coast in September 2005. It was arranged by the ADC and the Mid North Coast Group of Councils. A limit was placed on attendance which included senior executives of the eight Councils in the area and representatives from the disability sector. (A report on the workshop is enclosed.)

There was unanimous agreement that Councils should have a much greater involvement in disability. ADC, including members representing local government, has now recommended a more specific role for the involvement of Councils in the area.

Role of Local Government in Disability

ADC recommends that:

- Councils should be funded to adopt a greater, more systematic and consistent role in disability.
- Councils should ensure the provision of essential services rather than provide direct services. This might require them to assume an administrative role in support services.
- Councils should actively educate themselves, staff and the community about disability.
- The present roles of Councils could be diversified to include advocacy, lobbying, information collection and provision on disability.
- Councils should provide support to local organisations representing disability.

Local Disability Committees

1. To assist Councils in carrying out their function in disability ADC has recommended the establishment of Local Disability Committees as distinct from Access Committees.
2. Disability Committees would be community based organisations providing a forum for consumers, parents, carers, service providers and others to work collectively to improve conditions and services in the local community for persons with a disability.

Committees would inter alia:

- Provide a link between people with a disability and government and non government services.
- Work closely with local Councils (e.g., in the preparation of Community Strategic Plans).
- Involve themselves in self education and amass information on disability in their LGA's on needs and services and identify problems associated with service provision.

3. Disability Committees are in line with stated government policy to increase the scope and extent of community consultations. With no prescribed limitations imposed on their membership, functions or modus operandi they provide for a better representation and involvement of people, including consumers, in decision-making at a local level. This flexibility is seen to be very important given the changing nature of disability.

CONCLUSION

The current CSTDA Agreement calls for better services, strategies and strengthening of linkages across government and community.

In any review of CSTDA, ADC recommends acknowledgement of the role of local government in disability and in the improvement of services at the local level:

- That this role might be of an administrative nature and that local government might ensure the provision of services rather than provide services.
- That local government might establish Local Disability Committees which would reflect and extend the roles of Councils.

JOHN ROOTH
Chairperson
Mid North Coast Area Disability Committee
Encl

NB: Enclosures will be sent by Australia Post