



Council of Social Service of New South Wales

66 Albion St, Surry Hills NSW
phone 02 9211 2599 fax 02 9281 1968
email info@ncoss.org.au web www.ncoss.org.au

abn 85001 797 137

Mr. Elton Humphrey
Secretary
Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Elton,

RE: Supplementary Information to the CSTDA Inquiry

At the CSTDA Inquiry Hearing in Sydney on 3rd October, 2006, the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) was asked to provide supplementary information on the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) and the use of vouchers as a mechanism for the distribution of funding to people with disabilities and their families.

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)

The query regarding IPTAAS centred on whether assistance for escorts was available under this scheme. In NSW, IPTAAS will provide assistance for one escort accompanying an adult patient only if the doctor has certified the escort as necessary. For a child under 17 years, one escort is automatically included. NCOSS reiterates that people with disabilities and carers in rural and regional areas face significant difficulties in accessing specialist medical services. Families and carers could have other caring responsibilities and may require additional assistance to be available to travel great distances for periods of time away from home.

Use of Vouchers as a funding mechanism

NCOSS fully supports individualised funding to address the needs of people with disabilities and their families. NCOSS does not support the use of vouchers as an appropriate mechanism.

Individualised funding will provide improved responses to the person requiring support, tailoring this support to their specific needs and accounting for their specific circumstances rather than fitting them into pre-determined "boxes". NCOSS supports the provision of individualised funding systems such as the Attendant Care Program and in NSW the Community Participation Program for school leavers with disability. In both of these programs, funding is directed to an organisation for a named individual towards support, with a degree of flexibility and portability that responds to individual needs and goals. NCOSS also supports the allocation of funding to the disability service system where people can access existing and familiar services.

NCOSS has recently developed the *Working Together for NSW, Good Funding Policy and Practice* Paper which sets out appropriate practice for funding distribution. This is attached.

NCOSS has identified a number of difficulties with adverse impacts of a voucher system for people with disabilities. These include:

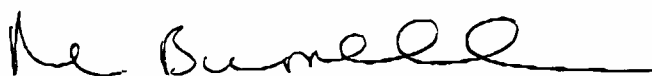
- What would a voucher purchase? Would it provide a session of therapy, or a number of sessions, at a pre-determined cost or market rates or whatever the chosen therapist charges? How would the number of sessions be determined, would this

change with changing needs? How will competing needs be balanced in an environment where services are budget limited?

- Vouchers assume standard hourly rates for service. Services to people with disabilities must be flexible enough to address specific needs and standard hourly rates within disability services could reduce access to service by people with differing or complex needs, with additional life circumstances or other non-standard requirements. The intended flexibility of vouchers might actually deliver perverse outcomes.
- Vouchers assume services are available. While some supports can be individually purchased (ie personal care), many services are provided by an organisation eg day supports. The disability service system is not yet sufficiently developed to have all the necessary service types in all areas. Interestingly, the voucher system for dental services has not attracted more dentists to areas where vouchers have been used to encourage increased patronage of dental services. NCOSS has received continuing reports of insufficient service.
- The adequacy and number of vouchers per person has been a constant problem for community dental services in NSW. In fact for dental services, the use of vouchers has resulted in inappropriate treatment, such as the removal rather than less intrusive treatments over time, to save teeth.
- Vouchers assume there are nearby services. This would present significant problems in rural and regional areas where travel would be an additional cost. In the city and especially in outer metropolitan areas, distances to services can still be significant and prohibitive for some people with disabilities.
- If vouchers were issued for specific services, this could be limiting in meeting the needs of the person with disability.
- Vouchers could create an unwelcome additional level of administration for service providers.
- Quality Assurance could be difficult to track, if the responsibility for service quality is transferred solely to the client and Government assumes a diluted role. NCOSS supports increased involvement of the client in quality assurance but Government must maintain a clear role in ensuring quality services to appropriate standards.
- Vouchers can also assume choice. With the level of unmet need and the inadequate range and spread of disability support services, there can be little or no choice for the person in the support services they need. Vouchers will not deliver choice in the absence of significant additional resources to address unmet need.
- The argument that vouchers could be pooled to create a new service assumes a level of organisation and capacity on the part of the person with disability and/or their family that may be unrealistic for many people without other assistance.
- In a worst case scenario, vouchers could also be inappropriately and unscrupulously used as a trading commodity in themselves.

NCOSS appreciates the opportunity to make these additional submissions to the Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA). Should further information be required, please contact NCOSS Christine Regan on 02 9211 2599 ext 117 or chris@ncoss.org.au

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Burrell
Acting Director