

20 August 2010

Ms Patricia Scott  
Commissioner  
Disability Care and Support Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Ms Scott

**Disability Care and Support Inquiry: Municipal Association of Victoria Response**

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) as the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria commends the Productivity Commission for undertaking a public Inquiry into the long term Disability Care and Support, and welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief response to the Inquiry. In addition some Victorian councils have also made responses to the Commission's Issues Paper.

Local Government plays a key role in identifying the social, economic and environmental needs of its municipality through integrated local area planning. Victorian councils have also played a significant role over the last century in the development of local universal human services and also responses to disadvantaged communities.

Victorian councils have a multifaceted role in working to support the development of policies, planning and practices which create more accessible and inclusive communities for people with disabilities and their families. By 2009 all Victorian councils had developed Disability Action Plans, consistent with the requirements of the Victorian Disability Act 2006, encompassing 'whole of council' and 'whole of community' strategies. Through the Community Building Initiative councils, in partnership with State Government, employ metro(politan) and rural access workers to further enhance local opportunities for access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

For more than half a century Victoria councils have had a major role in the planning, funding and provision of a range of human services including: maternal and child health, kindergartens, child care, Home and Community Care (HACC), youth, library and recreation services. People with disabilities and their families utilize all of these services.

The work of councils in the area of improving access and inclusion for people with disabilities as well direct provision of assistance to people with disabilities and their families has highlighted the significant shortcomings in the current funding levels and approaches to responding to the needs of people with disabilities and their families. These shortcomings are a significant barrier to enabling full participation of people with a disability in the community.

The possibility of significant improvements to the financing of assistance (through mechanisms similar to the Medicare or superannuation levy) and improvements to the way in which people with disabilities people are supported is most welcomed by local government.

The MAV appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the improvements being proposed for meeting the current and future support needs of people with disabilities and their families. The following highlights a number of key issues local government views as important to take into account in planning for future improvements

- **The importance of providing choice and a sense of control.** There is great variance between the nature of people's disabilities and their impacts, their circumstances, their family caring contexts and their personal attributes and aspirations. Thus people with disabilities and their families (as appropriate) should be able to exercise considerable choice over determining the type and combination of services they consider will best support them within whatever resource limits may be available to them through any new support scheme. People with a disability and their families must have a lead role in planning, implementation and evaluation of support responses and be supported to make decisions based on their needs and aspirations. The service system must adapt to this new approach and develop responsive practices that meet people's individual needs and aspirations.

To support people make informed choices clear concise information regarding the range of service options and arrangements available to choose from must be provided. People with a disability and their families may also need transition support to both understand the new system and take the lead role in decision making regarding support options. Service providers will also need transition support to understand their role in the new model and particularly in responding to a demand driven model. The option of people with a disability and or their families managing their own budget, which has been demonstrated in Victoria to be an empowering option, should be one of the options available to people.

- **Appropriate, flexible, reliable and adequate support for carers.** For many people with disabilities their family plays a critical and long term role in their support. For many carers, local, accessible facility based respite care is an essential ingredient in the service mix which enables them to sustain the caring role over the long term. In any redesign of the support system for people with disabilities and their carers there needs to be adequate services to support family carers including access to adequate, flexible and reliable residential / weekend respite services. A priority for attention is also supporting older carers through working to develop long term housing and support plans supported by adequate and ongoing funding for support for their adult child for whom they are caring. The lack of appropriate residential respite services has been a particular service shortfall identified by many municipalities.
- **The importance of sufficient investment in early intervention and rehabilitation.** Supporting young children through effective early intervention approaches known to prevent or reduce the impact of disabilities must be a priority area for any new scheme and subsequent reorientation of the disability sector. This has the potential to reduce longer term support costs and enhance future life options for these children. People who have recently acquired a disability through accident or illness (and are not covered through existing compensation systems) would also benefit from early intervention to reduce the impact of disability and enhance their quality of life as well as reduce long term care and support costs.
- **A balance between supporting people with very high support needs and those with significant but lesser needs.** One of the problems specifically experienced within local government community care and respite support services is the difficulty of having to balance within relatively small local budgets very high levels of support to a few people with more moderate levels of support to others with significant, but lower needs. For example to provide a new client with very high support needs with the level of assistance required, may mean that six other clients with more moderate, but equally important support needs can't be assisted - creating the need for an untenable choice. In a new disability support scheme these different levels of need should both be able to be met.

- **More housing and more diverse housing options.** The unmet needs of people with a disability in relation to housing have been clearly identified in the Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and or Mental Illness Report (Dec 2009). All levels of government in Australia must continue to seek to address the housing crisis experienced by vulnerable people in our communities. It is important that in the development and implementation of housing strategies access for people with disabilities is a central focus.

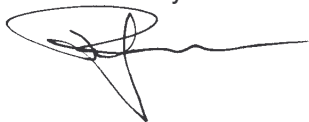
The availability of a range of housing options for people with disabilities will need to be part of development of a new and improved system of support for people with disabilities. It is imperative that the availability and range of housing options be linked to a continuum of support that can be matched to each person's individual needs. Within the development of housing options people with a disability should be able to stay in their own home with access to appropriate supports. Equally people with a disability and their families require greater access to home modification funding programs that are more reflective of actual home modification costs; this would potentially prevent some people from moving from the family home into supported housing. People with a disability, their families and supporters as well as disability service providers need to consolidate their knowledge of the range of housing options available to them.

- **Adequate data collection, monitoring and evaluation.** From the inception of any new scheme effective data collection processes need to be established to support effective monitoring and evaluation of the scheme and future planning at the national, state and local level. One of the key roles and responsibilities of local government is local planning, including the development of disability action plans and public health and wellbeing plans. The ability of local government to monitor local needs and plan effectively is heavily dependent on good data which gives insights into what is happening and needed locally. Thus the provision of reliable data at a local government level will enable more effective local planning for local community service development initiatives and to support broader support access and inclusion initiatives for people with disabilities.

In conclusion, the MAV on behalf of local government welcomes this inquiry into development of a new national disability care and support scheme. Development of an approach that provides for more adequate and predictable long term funding arrangements, greater consumer choice and control and more co-ordinated and more diverse support options will be a very important step in addressing the significant inequity and limited opportunities currently experienced by people with disabilities and their carers.

Should you require any further information regarding this letter, please contact Clare Hargreaves, Manager Social Policy ph 9667 5543 or email [chargreaves@mav.asn.au](mailto:chargreaves@mav.asn.au).

Yours sincerely



ROB SPENCE  
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