



State Budget Submission

2008 - 09

Victoria Best and Fairest



Published by: Victorian Council of Social Service

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street,
Melbourne VIC 3000

Ph: (03) 9654 5050

Fax: (03) 9654 5749

vcoss@vcoss.org.au

www.vcoss.org.au

ISSN: 1324 5791

© VCOSS 2007

This publication is copyright. Apart from fair dealings as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, non profit organisations have permission to reproduce part of the book not exceeding 10% of any section as long as credit is given to VCOSS and no charge is made by any such organisation with respect to any use made of the material.

Disability



The provision of adequate care (and) support is essential for both my physical and mental well-being, including both living independently in my own house and being able to participate fully in society

Peter Gibilisco¹

Disability services play an essential role supporting people to participate in community life, including in employment. At present disability services are seriously overstretched.

For many people this means a life not lived to its full capacity, as well as severe constraints on the community participation of carers. By building disability services up to levels that enable people's dignity and independence to be properly sustained, their human rights will be fulfilled and the economy will benefit from increased labour market participation by both people with disabilities and carers.

Around one in five Victorians – approximately one million people – have a disability.² This population is projected to increase by 2 per cent each year for the next three years with ongoing growth fuelled by ageing of the population.³ Growth in the numbers of people with a disability will increase demand on disability services, at the same time that ageing of the population constrains the capacity of family members to deliver care and support.⁴

VCOSS commends the Government's commitment to the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*'s priority goal of strengthening disability services to ensure they better meet the individual needs and choices of people with disability and enable their participation in the community on an equal basis with other Victorians.⁵ We welcomed the former Minister for Community Services commitment to address unmet need in disability services within this term of government⁶ and also welcomed increased investment in disability services and aids and equipment in the 2007-08 Budget. We note however that despite these commitments, the per capita spending on people with disability fell 1.2 per cent in the last budget.

Support and accommodation

As a result of under-funding, more than 2,500 people with disability are currently unable to access the supported accommodation or support they require to live full lives in the community.⁷

In the 2008-09 Budget investment in support and accommodation is VCOSS' top priority. While we acknowledge that investment in programs such as respite and transition planning are important, much demand for these services is a direct result of unmet demand for support and accommodation.

The 2008-09 Budget is also highly significant in the context of the current negotiations towards a fourth Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA). These negotiations present an historic opportunity for the State and Federal Government to commit to meeting current and future demand for disability services across the country. A strong commitment to support and accommodation by the Victorian Government in the 2008-09 Budget will present a valid challenge to the Federal Government to match this investment.

The amount of support many people with disabilities receive dictates the extent to which they are able to work, study, socialise and participate in the community.

Many people with disability able to undertake open employment testify that insufficient support in the home limits the amount they can work, an issue that creates flow on effects for the economy.⁸ Recent research also cites restrictions on the availability of support as one of the factors limiting the housing options of people with disability in Victoria.⁹ This exacerbates pressure on government to fund costly supported housing for people who, with support, may be able to live in the community.

The Government committed \$70 million for individualised support over four years in the 2007-08 Budget. If spent immediately, this would account for current recorded demand for support to live in the community, but would still fall short of accounting for disability population growth and under-met need – which will require ongoing recurrent investment.

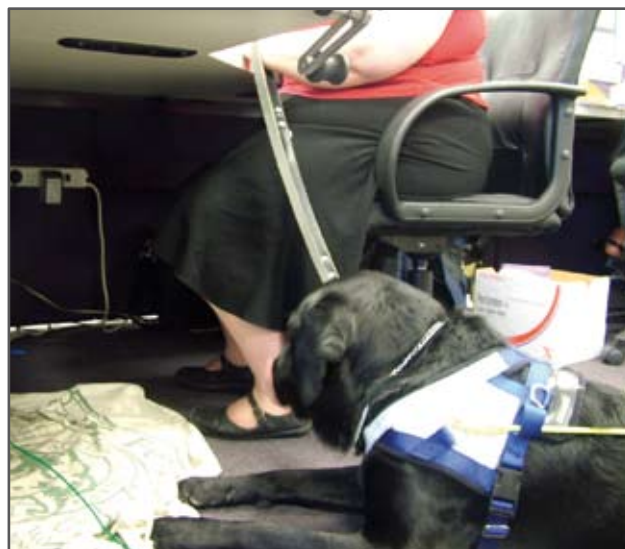
A lack of appropriate accommodation options trap many people with disability in their families' homes well beyond ages in which most people choose to live independently. While increasing affordable, accessible housing options and levels of support would reduce some demand for supported accommodation, most people with severe and profound disability will continue to require some type of supported accommodation. The profound effects on people with disability and unpaid family carers who have been denied access to supported accommodation - in many cases for many decades - is well documented.

Victoria's share of the Federal Government's Disability Assistance Package should create around 350 new supported accommodation places over the next five years for people with severe or profound disability over 40 whose carers are over 65.¹⁰ However it is difficult to calculate the real impact these new places will have on demand for supported accommodation, as the majority of those on the waiting list will not be eligible for them.

A commitment by the Victorian Government to sufficient resources in the 2008-09 Budget to halve the current waiting list for supported accommodation would be a strong and realistic commitment towards dealing with unmet need in this area.

Aids and equipment

Access to items such as communication devices, wheelchairs, ramps and hoists is vital to enable many people with disabilities to go about their daily lives and participate in the community. Recent research indicates that people with disability in Victoria receive only 60 percent of the total cost of their equipment from the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program, and are required to self fund or source between \$3,000 and \$7,000 additional funding for each equipment request. The typical maximum wait time for essential aids and equipment items is almost a year.¹¹



While increased investment for aids and equipment in the 2007-08 Budget was welcome, some regions estimate they need to double their existing funding to meet demand.

The consequences of long waiting times, high costs and inadequate subsidy levels for vital items include increased social isolation and the exacerbation of disabling conditions, as well as deterioration of the physical health of family members.¹² Timely access to aids and equipment, as well as improving the quality of life of both people with disability and carers, would therefore avoid upstream pressure on the health and disability systems.

VCOSS welcomed funds committed in the 2007-08 Budget for home and vehicle modifications. However, these funds have not yet begun to be released, and will not meet existing levels of demand as funds are only adequate to assist around 50 people per year to modify their vehicles.¹³ With over 30 percent of people with disability in Victoria reporting some type of physical disability, most of whom would have restricted mobility, more families and individuals need to be able to access vehicle modifications than current funding levels permit.¹⁴

VCOSS also proposes that the Government remove the 'once in a lifetime' restriction on access to funding for home modifications. While the majority of housing is inaccessible and is not built to be easily adaptable, home modifications impose a huge cost on many people with disabilities and their families.

Limiting access to assistance with modifications to once a lifetime constrains the ability to which people with disability are able to adapt their homes as their disabilities change with age. It also discourages people from moving from a modified home that may no longer be appropriate due to its location or other reasons, thus trapping them in housing which does not meet their needs.¹⁵

Future costs in this area would be significantly reduced if legislation requiring new housing to be accessible were implemented.

Recommendations

- 1 VCOSS proposes that the Government increase people's capacity to live independently by increasing investment in support and accommodation including:
 - a. bringing forward the \$70 million committed in the 2007-08 Budget for immediate spending and index this to account for disability population growth.
 - b. committing recurrent funding of \$50 million and capital funding of \$74 million to create up to 650 new supported accommodation places.
- 2 VCOSS proposes that the Government increase people's ability to live to their full capacity by increasing investment in aids and equipment including:
 - a. immediately releasing the remainder of funds committed for aids and equipment and home and vehicle modifications in the 2007-08 Budget; and
 - b. committing an additional \$20 million per annum for aids and equipment and home and vehicle modifications.

Notes

- 1 P Gibilisco, *The State Disability Plan – Rhetoric and Reality*, *Just Policy*, no. 39, Victorian Council of Social Service, Melbourne, March 2006.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings*, ABS, Canberra, 2003, table 5, p 19.
- 3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Current and future demand for specialist disability services*, AIHW, Canberra, 2007, p159.
- 4, p2
- 5 State Government of Victoria, *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*, Disability Services, Division, Victorian Government, Department of Human Services, Melbourne, 2002.
- 6 Disability services 2007-08 State Budget briefing, 50 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, 1 May 2007
- 7 The Disability Support Register as at June 2007 records 1294 people waiting for support to live in the community and 1361 people waiting for disability services supported accommodation options (www.dhs.vic.gov.au). It is broadly acknowledged that these figures are an underestimate of real demand.
- 8 Anecdotal evidence gained by VCOSS from participants in discussions on the Federal Welfare to Work changes, 2006-07
- 9 R Zakharov and J Minnery, *Disability Delphi study report*, 21st Century Housing Careers Project, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), 2007, p 4
- 10 Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), *Helping Older Carers and their Children factsheet*, http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/assistance_package.htm. The estimate of 350 places is based on one fifth of the estimated 1750 new places being allocated to Victoria on the basis of Victoria's disability population.
- 11 Scope, *Too little too late: Wait times and cost burden for people with a disability in seeking equipment funding in Victoria*, Melbourne, 2006, p 33
- 12 A Pate and M Horn, *Aids and equipment for Victorians with disabilities – entitlement or a hand-out?*, Research and Social Policy Unit, Melbourne CityMission, 2006
- 13 Personal communication with Rina Sherry, Manager Resource Optimisation, Disability Services, Department of Human Services, 16 August 2007
- 14 AIHW, 2007, table 3.3, p 34.
- 15 Kroehn et al, Project C: qualitative data collection, report of focus groups, *The housing careers of people with a disability and family members with care responsibilities for people with a disability*, AHURI, 2007