

## **CARERS POLICY**

*Statement by Minister for Family and Children's Services*

**MRS van de KLASHORST** (Swan Hills - Minister for Family and Children's Services) [12.15 pm]: The Government's policy for our maturing population, "Time on Our Side", released in October 1998, had a commitment to develop a carers policy. I am pleased to inform the House that I announced the policy today with the Ministers for Health and Disability Services. This policy will help build stronger communities by having a far-reaching effect on the State's 200 000 carers and those they look after. It addresses areas of unmet need, has provision to undertake research on the emerging needs of carers and will increase the public's awareness of carers and the important work they do.

An additional \$27m of government funds will be spent in the area over the next two years. This is on top of the existing funding to the area of \$70m a year. The policy recognises the important work of carers and the stress that often comes with caring for those who are dependent on others either through age, sickness or disability. It also recognises the growing dependence on carers resulting from the ageing of our population and longer life spans.

In the Health area, an additional \$800 000 of home and community care - HACC - funding will go towards developing new respite services and to increase existing levels of centre-based and in-home respite on weekdays, evenings and weekends. A further \$500 000 will go towards setting up new centre day care facilities and to upgrade existing services. The remainder of the funds in this area will be used to increase services such as home help, personal care, home nursing, transport and meals.

Seniors are one group in our community most involved in caring. People aged between 60 and 74 years are twice as likely as others to be carers, and the need for carers will increase with the ageing of our population. Initiatives to help carers include -

- to undertake research into the needs of young carers as well as Aboriginal carers, carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, socially and geographically isolated carers and carers of people requiring complex medical assistance;

- to undertake a pilot campaign to increase the awareness of available resources and issues for carers among general practitioners, other health professionals and care providers;

- to support carers through a pilot program to link them with others or through a telelink;

- to increase the access to carer retreats and to evaluate their use;

- the State Government will also sponsor a carers symposium in 2001 to help government and non-government agencies develop strategies to assist carers;

- to conduct a feasibility study into the range of concessions and subsidies available to carers; and

- the Department of Productivity and Labour Relations will develop an "Internet Eldercare Kit" and maintain the ongoing promotion of family friendly workplaces.

Finally, in Disability Services, the Government acknowledges the tremendous work of families and aims to support them, not replace them. The recently announced Disability Services Commission's second five-year business plan "Making a Difference" focused on areas of unmet need, families and carers, as well as strengthening and supporting families and communities. This policy underlines the Government's continuing support for the important work of carers and will help identify emerging trends in the area.