

## **ACROD PARKING PROGRAM**

*Statement by Minister for Disability Services*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Disability Services)** [12.09 pm]: I am pleased to stand here today to talk to members about the state government's recently announced expansion of the eligibility criteria for the ACROD parking program. The ACROD parking program enables people with disability and their carers to park in designated bays that are larger in dimension and close to building and complex entrances.

An estimated 411 500 Western Australians live with disability, including more than 90 000 who hold ACROD parking permits. In recent years, there has been concern that the ACROD eligibility criteria left out a number of people who need assistance to navigate car parks. In response, the McGowan government commissioned a review, which took into account the views of more than 530 stakeholders and highlighted concerns around safety in navigating car parks and the availability of designated parking bays. The review, which was led by the Department of Communities in collaboration with people with disability and National Disability Services, which administers the program, highlighted the significant barriers for people whose ability to safely navigate a car park is significantly restricted by a disability or medical condition.

The expanded eligibility criteria will now include people who are legally blind and people assisted by a guide dog, and will allow more people to have better access to their community. The review found that people who are legally blind often experience barriers when accessing the community, with the issue of safely navigating car parks consistently raised by individuals and support people. I want members to imagine that they are legally blind and relying on assistance from their guide dog. If they were in a busy car park, they would be led through rows of cars and would be listening out to avoid moving vehicles and being careful not to walk too close to cars for fear of hitting extended tow bars, trailers, bike racks or, worse, a reversing vehicle. It must be a terrifying experience. Those of us with sight have no idea just how hard it must be for someone with sight impairment.

Not surprisingly, the review also highlighted the need for more ACROD parking bays and recommended that strategies be developed to address this issue and to minimise bay misuse. In response, the next phase of the ACROD parking program will include the state government establishing a ministerial round table with industry stakeholders and intensive consultation with local government authorities.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this review and in the formulation of these new guidelines, including representatives from the National Disability Services' ACROD parking program and Blind Citizens WA Inc, notably Erika Webb and Greg Madson and his loyal guide dog, Memphis, who took part in the announcement on the day.