

DISABILITY SERVICES, EFFICIENCY DIVIDEND FOR EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

904. Hon Ken Travers to the Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Disability Services:

I refer to the Federal Government's policy of imposing a 1 percent efficiency dividend for agencies providing employment services to people with disabilities -

- (1) Does the Minister for Disability Services share the concerns held by ACROD, the Development Disability Council and ACE regarding the impact of this policy?
- (2) What action has the Minister taken, or is going to take, on this matter?
- (3) Is Federal funding for employment services enough to meet local demand, even without this policy impost?
- (4) What will be the likely effect of this policy on Western Australian providers?
- (5) Will this policy lead to a cost shift onto the State Government?
- (6) What does the Disability Services Commission expect will be the level of unmet demand for employment services in future years?
- (7) What will be the cost to the State as a result of this policy?
- (8) What action can all Members of Parliament take to address this issue?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE replied:

- (1) Yes
- (2) The Minister has raised concerns about the impact of efficiency dividends at the July, 2000 meeting of Commonwealth and State Disability Ministers and in previous correspondence to the Commonwealth Minister, Senator Jocelyn Newman. The Minister has also asked the Disability Services Commission to prepare a further letter to Senator Newman in this regard.
- (3) There is evidence that current funding levels and arrangements for employment services are inadequate to meet the needs of all people with severe and multiple disabilities who wish to pursue employment.
- (4) The imposition of efficiency dividends, now totalling 7% over five years, combined with other reforms to the Commonwealth disability employment program means that there is reduced capacity for employment agencies to assist people with severe and multiple disabilities.
- (5) The combination of Commonwealth reforms, including the application of efficiency dividends on agencies, is making it more difficult for people with severe and multiple disabilities to access the employment support they need. Cost-shifting to the State is occurring as people with disabilities seek alternative day options and families lose the respite effect received through their son or daughter's employment.
- (6) Precise data is not available, however, the Commission is informed about emerging demand through its Post School Options Program. Trends over the past 10 years indicate that in this age group alone, there will continue to be at least 150 school leavers with significant disabilities each year who will require employment places. These young people will add to existing unmet demand if their needs are not met.
- (7) The precise cost to the State is not known. However, it is clear that there is increasing demand on State funded day option and respite services, which is directly attributable to the increasing difficulty being experienced by people with severe and multiple disabilities in gaining, and maintaining, appropriate employment support. The human cost in terms of additional pressure on families and lost developmental opportunities for people with disabilities is incalculable.
- (8) Although equality of opportunity for people with disabilities should not be a political issue, the fact is that under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement, the Commonwealth has responsibility for employment services. Therefore, the Minister would welcome support from Members of Parliament in seeking to impress upon the Commonwealth the importance of providing adequate funding to ensure that all people with disabilities are provided with an opportunity to contribute to the workforce.