

DISABILITY SERVICES, ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT

780. Mr OMODEI to the Minister for Disability Services:

I refer the minister to figures released by the Developmental Disability Council of WA that reveal that 476 people with disabilities have applied for accommodation support over the past 12 months. Of these applicants, 50 per cent, or 238 people, were unsuccessful.

- (1) Does the Government intend to increase the funding for people with disabilities through its current business plan? If so, to what extent; and, if not, why not?
- (2) Given that the first Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement gave the States the responsibility for accommodation support funding, will the minister assure the disability sector that the State Government will match any commonwealth contribution under any future agreement with new money not already allocated by the previous Government under the existing business plan?

Ms McHALE replied:

I thank the member for the question. It has given me an opportunity to tell the House what I said on Tuesday when I reported back to the House on the negotiations of the CSDA.

- (1) The figures the member for Warren-Blackwood quoted from the DDC were provided by the Disability Services Commission on my instruction. When I took over the disability services portfolio, one of the first things that I learnt from the sector was that it had been kept in the dark about the process for funding and decision making. I said that, at the very least, people should be able to understand the process and the extent of applications. This Government has given the sector an unprecedented amount of information. That is with good cause, so that people know exactly the situation. I do not dispute those figures, because they came from the commission.

As the member for Warren-Blackwood well knows, I have been arguing with both Cabinet and the federal Government about unmet need in this State, which I am sure every State in Australia is doing. We have built growth into the forward estimates. As I said on Tuesday, the federal minister, Amanda Vanstone, acknowledged that Western Australia was the only State in Australia to build growth into the budget. As the member will know, we are in the process of budget deliberations. I assure him that the Western Australian position is recognised nationally.

- (2) This is an interesting question and I was surprised to hear the member for Warren-Blackwood ask it. The Government appreciates the work the member did as Minister for Disability Services. He was seen as a very dedicated minister. The issue of accommodation support funding being a state responsibility is complex. I am still getting my head around it.

Mr Omodei interjected.

Ms McHALE: I have read the first and second parts. When the CSDA was first negotiated, it was for the administration of accommodation support to be a state responsibility. The federal Government provided administration support to the employment services for people with disabilities. It was seen then as a shared responsibility between the federal and State Governments. I am glad the member asked me this because I need to inform the House that at the last ministerial council I was concerned that the federal Government was trying to shed responsibility for accommodation support. If that happened, it would have a negative impact on people with disabilities in this State. Accommodation support funding must be a shared responsibility between the federal Government and the State Government. That is our position and we are not prepared to move from that.

The CSDA is not about tied funds. The money the State Government will contribute is very clearly in excess of 50 per cent, so the amount this State contributes will exceed the matching amount. I hope that the federal Government will give us two things; if not, we will be most concerned. We need to have an ongoing commitment to unmet needs funding and to see potential growth. The State will do its bit and keep those issues forward. I will welcome an opportunity to have discussions with the federal Government about how much money it will contribute to accommodation support.