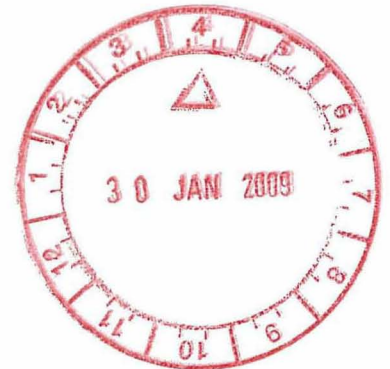


STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

**Legislative Council
Parliament of Western Australia**



INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC SECTOR EXPENDITURE

Submission by:

The Developmental Disability Council of WA (Inc)

Sue Harris

Chief Executive Officer

30th January 2009

The Developmental Disability Council (DDC) is a not for profit organisation *that works for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities and their families*. As part of its work, DDC runs the Politician Adoption Scheme. DDC raises issues of concern for people with developmental disabilities with government and decision makers.

The Developmental Disability Council thanks the Standing Committee for the opportunity to present a submission. This submission is relevant to Terms of Reference (a); (b) (ii); and (f).

DDC, in this submission, focuses specifically on Western Australians with disability and their families. For a very complex range of reasons, an analysis of which is outside the scope of this Inquiry, public funding for the assistance needed by this group of people falls seriously short of that required to provide the assistance that they need.

Despite ongoing increases in State funding since 1994 at least, the funding shortfall for disability remains critical. The Disability Services Commission is unable to help hundreds of people in dire need because of a lack of funding. The Commission conducts 'funding rounds' every four months. Approximately eight out of every ten people in critical need of assistance are turned away each funding round. The extent of disadvantage and difficulty this creates for people and their families is near impossible to imagine.

In short, funding increases have not been enough. With adequate funding the 'disability crisis' would be resolved. The population of people with disability is finite and the population requiring support services is relatively small, particularly those requiring extensive and ongoing support services. People with intellectual disability form a large percentage of the latter group.

The situation has been exacerbated by, until recently, the Commonwealth's refusal to accept a 'shared' responsibility for funding as specified in the Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreements. This has been a hotly debated topic among politicians, but the disability sector has been unanimous in the view that disability must be a shared responsibility and that the critical shortfall in funding demands cooperation from all levels of government.

The desperate shortfall in Disability funding has long been acknowledged by governments of all parties, Commonwealth and State. It has been studied, analyzed, counted, enquired into, consulted about and reported upon for well over a decade. All political parties acknowledged the crisis in the lead up to the State election. Both parties promised increases. It would be a devastating and disillusioning blow to find money given with one hand taken away with the other, particularly for those people and families living every minute of every day, year after year, in a state of crisis, waiting until the assistance they desperately need can be funded.

DDC appreciates the difficult economic times we are in. However, it is pertinent to note that through times of plenty and times of difficulty governments have not taken the decision to *resolve* the disability funding crisis. People with disability have always lived in difficult economic circumstances. Their families, in many instances, have limited capacity beyond caring responsibilities to earn a decent living and save for their future as do other citizens. DDC suggests that there is a very sound case for exempting people with disabilities and their families from taking their share of the burden imposed by these difficult economic times.

When looking at Terms of Reference (a) and (b) (ii) DDC urges the Committee to give every consideration to exempting Disability from any cuts in funding. DDC is very strongly of the view that if any efficiencies can be found within disability, they should be redirected to providing desperately needed services to more people.

When looking at Term of Reference (f), DDC urges the Committee to ensure that the growth outlined in the forward estimates for Disability be maintained, as a minimum.

DDC suggests that the key questions in relation to disability are:

- What is it costing the Western Australian community and government *not* to provide the support and assistance that citizens with a disability and their families need?
- What would it cost to provide the assistance that people with disability and their families need in a timely and dignified manner?
- How/when will this level of funding be achieved?

DDC is involved in an ARC funded Research Project with Edith Cowan and Murdoch Universities which is looking at the first two questions for people with an intellectual disability. The findings of this Project are expected to be available before the end of this year. The third question is a hot topic of debate within sections of the disability community. It would be most encouraging and cause for great hope to see this debate lead by our elected representatives and key decision makers.

In summary, this submission asks the Committee to:

- **Exempt Disability from the 3% efficiency dividend.**
- **Redirect any efficiencies that can be found in Disability to providing services and support to people with disability and their families desperately waiting for assistance.**
- **Recommend that the growth committed to disability in the Forward Estimates be honored, as a minimum.**
- **Consider options for focusing debate, as a matter of urgency, on how to *resolve* the ongoing disability funding crisis**

DDC would be pleased to provide any clarification or further information relating to this submission. If the Committee felt it may assist to hear directly from people with disability and their families, we would be pleased to arrange this.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Sue Harris
Chief Executive Officer
Developmental Disability Council of WA

30 January 2009