

Peter Draper
Member for Tamworth
(02) 6766 1422/0417 290 376

Richard Torbay
Member for Northern Tablelands
(02) 6772 5552/0427 635 029

Media Release

10.8.04

MPs demand no cuts to disability funding

Minister for Disabilities Carmel Tebbutt has agreed to consider arguments against proposed cuts of up to 60 per cent to day care hours and quality of services to people with disabilities following yesterday's meeting with Independent MPs Peter Draper and Richard Torbay at Parliament House.

At the meeting the MPs presented case histories demonstrating the proposed changes would have a devastating impact on families and service providers.

They asked the Minister to retain the current level of funding and day care services and to ensure that future service provision would be weighted towards not for profit organisations such as Challenge.

This would guarantee that cost cutting and inferior services would not be the main consideration when expressions of interest in service provision were examined following the September 3 closing date.

"The Minister gave us a sympathetic hearing and an undertaking to consider carefully the issues we raised and the evidence we presented," Mr Draper said. "We have given her an extensive list of questions which she has agreed to answer."

Mr Torbay said the documentation presented to the Minister outlining the predicaments of families whose access to day care could be halved, provided a convincing case.

"We are not prepared to see the most vulnerable people in our community and their families go back to the dark ages," he said. "They benefit from social stimulation and the quality programs they currently receive from places like Challenge and this should not be disrupted."

Through the proposed changes announced by the Minister last month the ATLAS (Adult Training, Learning and Support) and PSO (Post School Options) would be dropped next year, to be replaced with two new programs Community Participation and Transition to Work.

Effectively it would mean that funding to support day care services for people with disabilities needing high support levels will be cut from \$22,000 annually to between \$9000 and \$13,500. There are concerns that Day care services would be reduced from the current three days a week to one day a week.

Mr Draper said the questions put to the Minister at today's meeting asked for

- an explanation for the proposed cuts
- the rationale behind requiring young people with disabilities to seek work when the rates of unemployment in country areas was already so high
- an examination of the impact on families through cuts in day care respite
- an economic assessment of the flow on effect of job losses and family members leaving work and study to care for their children with disabilities
- an explanation of why the government appears to have breached its own standards regarding consultation and choice for people with disabilities.

Mr Draper and Mr Torbay presented representations from protest meetings in Tamworth and Armidale directly to the Minister at yesterday's meeting.