

Phil's Remarks

Introduction

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this important resolution.

Whilst I am a HACSU delegate today, I am not speaking on behalf of HACSU and, whilst I am President of the largest support group in Victoria for families who have a family member living in disability accommodation, Supportive Families and Friends Association Eastern Metropolitan Region, I am not speaking on behalf of the Association either. I am speaking on behalf of my 29 year-old son, Jeremy, who is a resident of a Department of Health and Human Services group home for people with a disability.

Jeremy has an autism spectrum disorder and has no speech. Thanks to the ground-breaking work of Dr Rosemary Crossley of the Anne McDonald Centre, when Jeremy was 15 years of age, we found that he could communicate with a communication device, when assisted to do so. However, he would not be able to address this Conference.

I am speaking on behalf of Jeremy, as a very involved parent and as an ALP Life Member in support of this resolution.

Where are the residents and their families?

You may wonder why only the union appears to be opposing the Government's policy to privatise Government-managed disability services. There are few, if any, residents protesting, as the residents are some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

You may also wonder where their families are and why they are not protesting! At 66 years of age, I am one of the younger parents with an adult child living in disability accommodation. Many, if not most of the residents, do not have involved parents or siblings, and many of the parents who are involved are elderly and burnt out from a lifetime advocating for their now- adult child

As a Life Member of the Labor Party, I can assure you that I would not be here addressing you if I thought that the State Government's proposal to privatise public disability services is a good policy that would benefit my son. It is not!

Expressions of Interest to privatise services

Last month the Victorian Government called for Expressions of Interest to privatise public disability accommodation, which comprises 500 homes housing 2,500 people with disabilities, supported by nearly 5,000 workers. The Government has asserted that this action is in line with the choice and control model of the NDIS.

The NDIS model is to provide funding to people with a disability, to meet their needs. As these people buy services with their funding, the provision of services will expand

As admirable model, but not one that can easily be applied to the provision of disability accommodation, for several reasons.

Firstly, there is a major problem with the NDIA's approach to funding disability accommodation

There is a large funding gap between government and non-government services, with the government sector better funded.

As a consequence, the non-government sector provides lower pay, more casual staff are employed, staff are less qualified, and there is less supervision of staff.

Under the NDIS, the already lower funding of the non-government services is set to be even lower. However, due to an outcry by stakeholders, including the Victorian Government, the Productivity Commission is currently reviewing the funding of NDIS services.

With an inquiry underway and broad acknowledgement that funding is inadequate, it would seem to be a most inopportune time to be seeking expressions of interest from non-government providers, yet this is what the Victorian Government is currently doing..

Secondly, the provision of disability accommodation cannot increase in the short or medium term, as suitable properties do not exist. If current residents and those on waiting lists were provided with funding for accommodation today, no one would be choosing to go anywhere, as there are no vacant beds to choose.

Contrary to the Government's assertions, privatising disability accommodation will not expand service provision at all. All it will mean is transfer of management and a reduction in service.

Thirdly, we are speaking here of a cohort of people who generally are not capable of making choices about their accommodation.

A majority of residents have complex needs and a cognitive and/or communication impairment which prohibits them from participating in the rollout of the NDIS in any meaningful way. A majority of residents do not have family who are able to advocate on their behalf. So, most residents are not capable of exercising choice and control of their affairs.

A shortcoming of the NDIS rollout and of the Government's proposed privatisation policy, is that they rely on people with a disability, or their family, being able to advocate their needs and exercise choices. And this is often not the case.

If the privatisation policy were implemented, I predict that the overwhelming majority of current residents would be living in the same house and sleeping in the same bed as at present, but it would be with a non-government provider supporting them, with less funding and providing inferior services.

People with disabilities, including my son Jeremy, would be worse off!

Comparison with education

The Governments' proposal to privatise Government managed disability accommodation is equivalent to the Government privatising all State schools, by putting them up for tender by the non-government sector.

The families and staff of the Government schools would object and launch the biggest protest ever seen, and rightly so!

It would not be ok for schools, so why is it ok for disability services, which care for the most vulnerable members of our community?

Besides, privatisation of government disability services is inconsistent with Labor values!

I urge you to support my son Jeremy and the other 2500 residents in government –managed group homes, by supporting this resolution. I commend the resolution to the floor.