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The Executive Officer
Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir,

Financial Abuse is debilitating for those with so little in their lives

Please accept the following as a submission to part two of the state inquiry into abuse in disability services for those in our society who have an intellectual or multiple disability - those who are unable by reason of their disability to make reasonable judgements in respect of all or any matters concerning their personal circumstances and/or estate.

This inquiry into services for people who are especially vulnerable because of their limited intellectual capacity to understand many aspects of their lives, most especially their finance situation and its ability to seriously limit their quality of life. This is especially so when support service provision is moving rapidly into a very bean-counting mindset. Funding levels, staff ratios and service need assessments are first considerations, rather than the needs of the person with so little in their life.

In moving towards NDIS, many non-government service providers are being advised by their peak body to seriously consider taking-on those with high to very high support needs as their service needs assessment may be inadequate and/or challenging. This is generally known as "Cherry Picking".

Specifically, financial abuse is occurring in Victoria in respect to residential charges between state government managed supported accommodation group homes and non-government group homes. Those with almost identical support needs could easily be

living next door to each other and paying totally different living costs (Residential Charges). Yet non-government service providers are not obligated to provide a breakdown of their fixed-rate, percentage-of the DSP (Disability Support Pension), residential charge.

The Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) currently block funds the support service costs for the residents of its own group homes at a staffing level sufficient to provide support and care services which are within the intent its very extensive and very comprehensive care policies, standards and values, and which includes community access.

Whereas, the DHHS block funds non-government services at a level allowing just basic-care staffing levels. These houses, being funded on a 1:6 ratio, residents cannot be supported to leave the facility without additional funding in the form of an ISP (Individual Support Package) to allow the residents community access.

Currently, residents living in state government group homes pay around 47% of DSP (Disability Support Pension) for rent housekeeping and utilities, and 100% of CRA (Commonwealth Rent Assistance) for which they receive manchester, whitegoods and transport.

Whereas, residents living in non-government group homes pay up to 75% of DSP, 100% of CRA, and pay for manchester, whitegoods and transport.

An extensive review of residential charges was undertaken by the VPSC (Victorian Public Sector Commission), whereby they say the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) is claiming their charges are subsidised and their services are unsustainable at this level of subsidy.

The VPSC report estimates, these are claims by DHHS that the department faces a shortfall of \$25million (including unfunded liabilities) in 2014-15 for group home accommodation, housekeeping, administration and transport. Whereas, most of the department's claimed losses are directly due to their poor management, level of waste, excessive administration and proscription.

This VPSC review claims to have found residential charges for the residents of DHHS homes does not cover the cost of that it was intended to cover – rent, housekeeping and utilities. Whereas, our direct, in practice, findings shows that 47/50% of DSP is an adequate residential charge.

Non-government residents have to pay up to 75% of DSP, as the DHHS fails to fully fund CSOs for support service costs.

Where residents are fully funded for their support serviced costs, residential charges should not exceed 50% of DSP.

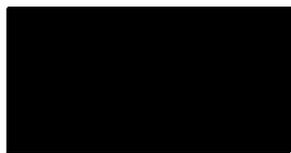
The DHHS in its bureaucratic blindness and procrastination has not ensured all people with similar needs are charged similar.

This being a level where residents are left with adequate disposable income to ensure their lifestyle is the best it can be within the limitations of their disabilities. And, not at a level whereby they are forced to be degraded to the extent of having to apply for hardship.

The DHHS has put the VPSC report in their too-hard-basket, leaving the NDIS national practice policy to level the residential charges upwards, with DHHS residents being expected to pay the excessive charges being imposed upon non-government residents... So much for the NDIS saying, "No one moving to NDIS will be worse off".

In conclusion, we include the following paper in this submission:-

- Our paper, "The way residents of DHHS (Victoria) group homes are dressed is often shocking, considering their finances!",



Tony & Heather Tregale
Coordinators, LISA Inc.

The way residents of DHS (Victoria) group homes are dressed is often shocking, considering their finances!

The residents of DHS group homes have always had a good financial deal. Even better since the department introduced “bundling” of the residential charges in 2013 - with free manchester and white goods in exchange for handing over the full CRA, which most residents were not getting anyway.

Therefore, almost without exception, the residents of department managed group homes throughout, have very adequate financial resources. However, almost without exception, these resident’s finances are not being used to fully support their potential quality of life.

Frequently, ‘Personal Expenditure’ (the residents ‘pocket money’) is not used as intended in their ‘Financial Plan’, that of doing activities in the community - such as going to the pool or spa, cinema, dining out, mini golf, bowling, dancing, etc, etc. Rather, unused money is returned to the resident’s trust fund

A resident supported by their family to always have the best clothes, has set an example for the other residents in the department managed group home. Whereas, the general direct care staff standard for their residents’ clothes and shoes is often quite low and spasmodic.

If the said resident had no family support when moving into a department group home, the standard attire would have been ‘tracky-pants’, a cheap top and slip-on or Velcro strap shoes, or similar. As this is all quick and easy for direct care staff.

It is standard practice for department managed group homes to have no firm provision for clothing and shoe repairs or replacement, or shoe cleaning. It is all totally dependent on the integrity of staff, as there is little or no management direction and service level and quality monitoring.