



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 30 October 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Disability Services Budget

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.12 a.m.), by leave: Support for people with disabilities in Queensland is an area which has seen dramatic funding boosts and policy reforms over the past three years. Recurrent funding for new initiatives has increased by more than \$50 million and we have made capital allocations of \$10.2 million, including spending on new respite services. In just a decade, the non-government disability sector has moved from receiving just a few million dollars from the state to receiving more than 60 per cent of the \$304 million budget of Disability Services Queensland. We have pledged to increase the budget by \$60.8 million in this term and made a commitment to revisit this at every budget.

Queenslanders with disabilities have their own department and agencies across the Government have demonstrated commitments to inclusion. But we know we have a good way to go with the level of need well in excess of the service delivery capacity. I am pleased to announce that Disability Services Queensland is embarking on a funding reform strategy that will help map the way forward in meeting this need and ensure that the Disability Services budget is spent in a way that better supports people with disabilities.

One of the most pressing issues it will place under the microscope is the viability, or sustainability, of non-government service providers. As I have said, NGOs receive more than 60 per cent of the Disability Services budget. About half the NGO grants go to six big organisations: the Endeavour Foundation, the Cerebral Palsy League, Uniting Care, Centacare, Multicap and the Cootharinga Society of North Queensland. For some services, government funding supplements income raised from elsewhere and volunteers are the human resources backbone.

As we saw with the crisis in Endeavour last year, factors including a shrinking fundraising base can put even the state's biggest disability service provider in jeopardy. In line with an election commitment, a key element of the funding reform strategy will be working with services to gain a clear picture of their financial affairs so that we can better plan for the future of the non-government sector. A better response to sector viability issues requires a close partnership between government and the sector. I have been very impressed by the professionalism of sector members, many of whom have already shown enthusiasm for this project. While these organisations are the substrate of an effective disability sector, the consumers of government and non-government services are the people for whom the strategy is being implemented. The main aim is more and better support for people with disabilities and their families.

I have recently signed off on three major individualised funding program rounds: family support for the families of children with disabilities; Moving Ahead for school leavers; and Adult Lifestyle Support, tailored support packages helping people with disabilities to live in the community. Following this funding round, we will have more than 400 families, 340 young adult school leavers and about 1,000 adults receiving individualised funding. A focus of this strategy will be refining the links between the different programs so that people with disabilities have a smoother pathway through life.

While funded services deliver vital support for many Queenslanders, we cannot forget that the primary source of support for many people with disabilities remains families and friends. Parents, be their children school aged or in their fifties, frequently ask me about the future of their sons and daughters. It is my hope that the results of the funding reform strategy will give these tireless carers

some peace of mind. Many of the challenges to be tackled under this strategy involve approaches from across government and I thank ministers whose departments have agreed to cooperate with Disability Services Queensland. These departments include the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Treasury and Queensland Health and will form a coordinating committee with Disability Services Queensland. To formally engage the sector, Disability Services Queensland will also form a steering committee with members of the non-government sector. The department will keep the community informed of progress through consultation and regular communication.

It would be remiss of me not to report back to the House on a matter I raised here some months ago. On 29 May 2001, I raised the alarm over the federal government's failure to include in its forward estimates funding for a promise it made last year. The result of this failure would be a \$248.9 million reduction in federal funding for Australians with disabilities over three years. Five months have passed since I wrote to Senator Amanda Vanstone, the responsible minister, seeking an assurance that the funding would be provided. I have not yet received a response. Hopefully, with 12 days to go in the federal campaign, Senator Vanstone has not forgotten about people with a disability.
