

### Disability Alliance election priorities – ALP response

*Queensland's Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme is the worst in the nation. People cannot afford the medical aids and equipment they need, which means that Queenslanders:*

- 1. have less independence (relying more on family and service providers than they would otherwise need to);*
- 2. have longer hospital stays than they need; and*
- 3. can be re-admitted to hospital with complications and infections caused by inappropriate equipment.*

#### **Response**

As you would be aware, in May 2008 Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Ministers noted that was a range of issues relating to the delivery of aids and equipment to people with disabilities across jurisdictions that need to be addressed.

Accordingly, Disability Ministers agreed to work toward more consistent access to aids and equipment between states and territories. A re-elected Bligh Government looks forward to participating in this important partnership with the Rudd Government.

More than anything, our objective in this national work will be to work towards greater funding to improve accessibility to medical aids.

In addition, a re-elected Bligh Government will also undertake a review of the Medical Aids and Subsidy Scheme to consider the issues you have raised. As part of this, the Government will explore a repair / replacement system for medical aides and opportunities to improve forward-planning for people requiring medical aides.

*The problem with patient care policies and procedures in Queensland hospitals is that currently, they result in:*

- 1. people with disabilities being neglected to the point that they are made vulnerable by the health system;*
- 2. a reluctance from people with a disability to enter the health system (which also makes them vulnerable);*
- 3. disability support workers being required, in many places, to support their clients throughout every stage of contact with the hospital (which is a poor use of resources); and*
- 4. people with a disability experiencing poor health outcomes due to a lack of timely access to support (for things like communication and assistance to navigate the health system).*

As you would be aware, Queensland Health has a Disability Service Plan 2007-2010, which provides a policy framework outlining how Queensland Health will meet the needs of people with a disability and their families.

In recognition of the issues you have raised a re-elected Bligh Government will commit to establishing a taskforce with NGO representation to provide advice to Government on how implementation of the Queensland Health policy for the provision of health services for people with a disability can be improved.

We will also establish cross agency Committee to examine issues in relation to access to health services by adults with a decision making impairment.

In addition, the Disability Services Act 2006 requires all Queensland Government departments to implement Disability Service Plans. Disability Service Plans aim to provide increased responsiveness and gradual improvement of government services in addressing the needs of people with a disability including more coordinated whole-of-government responses.

The Queensland Health Disability Service Plan 2007-2010 includes 53 key actions with a focus on improving access to safe and sustainable specific health care services for people with disabilities as a part of the overall reform of Queensland Health.

DSQ has recently purchased the license to use the Comprehensive Health Assessment Program. This program serves as a guide for general practitioners, nurses, disability service providers and other professionals to collect the health information and medical history for people with an intellectual disability, as well as to work together to prepare a health plan.

The Comprehensive Health Assessment Program can also be used to provide good base-line data on the health status of people with an intellectual disability and thus enable health related changes to be tracked over time.

This tool is available to all DSQ funded non-government service providers and is used as part of the annual health review for people with an intellectual disability. A recent evaluation of the Comprehensive Health Assessment Program highlights a substantial increase in the attention of medical practitioners to the health needs of adults with an intellectual disability and more health promotion and disease prevention activities.

#### **Personal Care**

*Thousands of Queenslanders who are eligible to receive personal care and/or support are unable to access the support they need, resulting in:*

- *A poor quality of life of thousands of Queenslanders*
- *Young people with disability being housed in aged care facilities and other inappropriate arrangements*
- *Queenslanders with a disability unable to work (and pay tax)*
- *Family breakdowns across the State; and*
- *Under pressure on other areas of the community (including family and community services, and the criminal justice system).*

The Home and Community Care program provides options designed to improve the quality of life for frail aged and people with a disability. The Government recognises that social isolation is an issue facing too many Queenslanders, which is why the Home and Community Care program and other social isolation initiatives, promoted by this government, play a significant role in actively supporting Queenslanders to achieve their goals.

This government also supports Disability Services Queensland's Local Area Coordinator program. This program works in rural and remote communities across the State, linking people with a disability to a range of different support networks and services, depending on their individual needs and interests.

Local Area coordinators work with individuals, their families, friends and their local community to assist families to set goals and plan for the future and to link in with practical assistance. They help to build and strengthen support networks and friendships and bringing other families together to share ideas and experiences.

This program also looks at ways to maintain or gain an individuals independence in their daily life and identify ways of participating in social, recreational or other interests and be actively involved in their community.

The Bligh Government is also committed to assisting younger Queenslanders with a disability who are residing in aged care facilities due to no available alternative accommodation.

The Government has committed \$23.9 million over five years for the Younger People in Residential Aged Care Initiative, which is matched by the Rudd Government. This has been achieved through a Council of Australian Governments five-year initiative to reduce the number of young people with disabilities living in residential aged care.

Funding has been provided to non-government service providers to support people to return or remain living with their families, to live independently in public or private rental accommodation and to share with others in other DSQ shared accommodation.

DSQ has established purpose built accommodations in Brisbane, Cairns and the Gold Coast. Accommodation is also being developed on the Sunshine Coast for people to move from aged care.

Queensland is making good progress with the development and implementation of this initiative with a range of different supports being made available throughout Queensland.

This includes funding provided to Wesley Mission Brisbane, who in partnership with Youngcare, built a 16-bed apartment complex in Sinnamon Park which was opened by the Premier. The Queensland Government provided \$1.3 million to assist with the construction and set up costs. A further \$1.5 million will be provided on a recurrent basis to provide residents with support services. A re-elected Bligh government will also provide a further \$3 million to Youngcare to help fund respite care for young people with disabilities on the Gold Coast.

Further, funding has been provided to St John's Community Care in Cairns to provide support to 10 people in two purpose-built houses in Gordonvale.

People in the other areas of Queensland will also be supported and service providers will be identified for them on an individual basis.

The Bligh Labor Government will continue to move forward in working with families and individuals across the state to assist them to achieve their preferred outcomes for residential support.

The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* provides protection for everyone in Queensland against discrimination based on disability, including those in the workplace. This government is committed to providing a workplace where there is equal employment opportunity that recognises and values the many benefits of a diverse workforce.

The Office of the Public Service Commissioner is also responsible for the administration of the Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Act 1992 and ensuring that public sector agencies meet their equal employment obligations.

The Government respects any employees whose lives may be affected by mental or physical illness or disability and is committed to providing as much support as possible.

The Queensland Public Service Commissioner has developed guidelines to provide advice to Queensland public service agencies on the application of section 85 of the *Public Service Act 1996* and has developed guidelines specifically around providing advice to departments regarding open communication, procedural fairness and early and informal intervention.

The Government also provides support for people with a disability to enter the workforce with programs such as the *First Start* program, which provides traineeships at an entry level position for jobseekers with little or no work experience.

In relation to family breakdown, the Bligh Government provides a range of targeted programs to support parents – particularly families with multiple and complex risk factors - in caring for their children.

These programs include 10 Referral for Active Intervention (RAI) services, 11 Prevention and Early Intervention Projects and 11 Specialist Counselling Services.

The majority of these programs aim to provide the family support and early intervention services that medium and high risk families need to prevent their progression to the statutory child protection system.

The Government is currently focusing on strategies to increase the service capacity of prevention and early intervention services to ensure that vulnerable families receive the right service at the right time.