



Dignity and Independence

Canberra**liberals**

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The Canberra Liberals aim to provide people with a disability with the services they need so that they can attain the best possible quality of life.

Unmet Demand for Disability Support

People with disabilities are among some of the most needy in the community. The challenges and struggles faced on a daily basis by people with disabilities and their families are not visible or well publicised.

One local mother summed up the situation as follows.

“Non-disabled Canberrans don't realise the constant struggle people with a disability and their families have to access almost any service. They don't realise that people with a disability, once they are adults, are likely to have isolated lives with little hope of having somewhere to live, some meaningful employment or funding for support. When non-disabled Canberrans are informed of the real situation they are invariably uncomprehending, shocked and bewildered.” (*Canberra Times*, 18 March 2005)

In the ACT, one in every six people identifies as having a disability and one in seven provides unpaid care to family members, friends or neighbours. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the ageing of the population and increased life expectancy are leading to higher prevalence of disability and more people with severe or profound disabilities (AIHW, *Disability in Australia*, August 2008)

Individual Support Packages were introduced in the 1990s to assist people with a disability to live in the community, rather than in institutional care. Since then the use of ISPs has expanded to include:

- Addressing gaps in support services;
- Providing individuals with control over the use of funds; and
- Assisting consumers with high or complex needs.

Some ACT Government funding is one-off and some is ongoing support.

We know that there is a huge level of unmet need for disability services in the ACT, with people who qualify to receive assistance missing out because of a lack of allocated resources. For example, in the October 2007 funding round to consider priority unmet need, there were 144 applications for disability support and only 62 were

successful, leaving 82 applicants with no funding. Funding is awarded on the basis of the highest assessed priority and available resources so there may be nothing left for those who need assistance but fall further down the priority chain.

There are also problems with portability as demonstrated in a recent case where an applicant was unable to get any assurance from the ACT Government that her Individual Support Package from Queensland would be extended by the ACT Government and made recurrent, to give her and her family certainty about her continued support.

There are problems too when people first become severely disabled in between ISP funding rounds. For example, a young man with a severe acquired brain injury was unable to secure an Individual Support Package because funding had run out in between rounds. Yet the Government was making public announcements that those who missed out on ISPs were “receiving department support for respite care and other services” (*Canberra Times*, 9 March 2005). According to the family in this case, they had been seeking support from the department without success.

The ACT has the worst funded equipment scheme in the country for people with a disability. In the ACT there are only a very few devices and technologies available (covered in a third of a page on the ACT Health website as opposed to NSW which provides over 70 aides covered in ten pages).

The situation in the ACT is so bad that some people wait 12 to 18 months for wheelchair seating assessments. During this time, their bodies deteriorate and this can lead to significant adverse health issues that end by costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in hospital care. For example, bad pressure sores from poor seating can result in hospitalization over months.

Our Priorities

The Canberra Liberals make these commitments to people with disabilities, their families and their carers.

- \$5.8 million to increase the number of Individual Support Packages (ISP's). This will provide a significant increase to help a number of individuals and their families.
- Support for more flexibility and choice in the accommodation sector for people with a disability.
- A complete review of the ACT Equipment Scheme, to devise a model designed to better meet the diverse needs of its clients.
- Opportunities for enhanced training courses and opportunities for staff within the sector addressing the areas of skill diversification and multi skilling.
- \$800,000 'hospital to home' disability fund to assist with sudden onset acquired disabilities, for example through road trauma, to retrofit a home so the person can return to their home. This initiative will prevent costly hospitalisation and free up extra beds.

Individual Support Packages

People with a disability deserve the opportunity to live lives that are as independent and satisfying as can be achieved. The provision of appropriately designed Individual Support Packages (ISP) is an essential to meet the needs of these people and allow them to live outside institutional settings.

There is a high level of unmet need for assistance and additional funding will assist in helping the most important cases of the unmet need.

A Canberra Liberal Government will provide \$5.8 million to increase the number of Independent Support Packages. This will provide a significant increase to help a number of individuals and their families.

If averaged at \$40,000 each (the minimum level for high assistance and maximum level for medium assistance packages), then this would assist up to 50 additional people.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
ISP Increased Funding		1,600	2,086	2,122

Additional ISPs (if \$40,000 each)		40	50	50
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Review of Accommodation Options

(a) Service Provision

A Canberra Liberal Government will determine what capacity exists to be able to offer more flexibility and choice in accommodating people with a disability. One option in this evaluation is to open up the system of providing accommodation to the community housing sector, subject to requirements for high standards of management and care.

It will be important to ensure in this evaluation that the consideration of additional options for accommodation does not lead to the detriment of Government-run Group Homes.

(b) Future Options for Disabled People under Parental Care

A particularly significant issue involves parents who have a disabled child. In situations where these parents are caring for their child, there are concerns that older parents will reach the point where they cannot continue to care for their child or that they will die and leave their child with an uncertain future. We will review the policy

arrangements and develop flexible accommodation options that can provide these parents with the confidence they need that their children will continue to be properly cared for.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
Review of accommodation provision and future options for people under parental care		150		

Sudden Onset Disability

Some people become disabled as a consequence of some sudden traumatic event, such as a car accident. To enable these people to be catered for, a fund of \$800,000 will be established to enable the retrofitting of the person's home to be undertaken. This will take pressure off the hospital system, as the patients are able to return to their homes with appropriate care rather than living in high cost, specialist facilities.


We will establish an \$800,000 'hospital to home' disability fund in 2008-09 to assist with sudden onset acquired disabilities, for example through road trauma, to retrofit a home so the person can return to their home. These people are now stuck in hospitals, so savings are potentially significant. This will also help provide support services between ISP rounds. Funding drawn down from the fund will be used as a basis to determine future funding needs.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
Hospital to Home Fund	800			

Other Priorities

There are many challenges to be met in addressing the needs of people with disabilities and their carers. The Canberra Liberals will address a range of other priorities.

- The Canberra Liberals will seek to maximise the availability of staff who are directly involved in delivering front line services within the current resources available to Disability ACT. We will seek to improve flexibility, so that when a particular need arises, more staff can be devoted for a short term to assist in resolving that matter.
- We value a skilled workforce and will encourage staff to take enhanced training opportunities to staff working with people with disabilities within existing resources.

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- We will improve the public reporting of data on the demand for disability services and the extent of unmet need.
 - Sport for many people with a disability is an important way for them to fulfil their life's potential. It is a great way to build strength, stay fit and make lasting friendships. A Canberra Liberal Government will work with representatives from Canberra's disability and sporting communities to develop strategies to maximise the participation of people with disabilities in sporting and recreation activities.