

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2006-07 budget estimates

Melbourne—14 June 2006

Members

Mr W. R. Baxter

Ms C. M. Campbell

Mr R. W. Clark

Mr B. Forwood

Ms D. L. Green

Mr J. Merlino

Mr G. K. Rich-Phillips

Ms G. D. Romanes

Mr A. Somyurek

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Deputy Chair: Mr B. Forwood

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms M. Cornwell

Witnesses

Ms S. Garbutt, Minister for Community Services;

Ms P. Faulkner, secretary;

Mr A. Rogers, executive director, disability services; and

Mr A. Hall, acting executive director, financial and corporate services, Department of Human Services.

The CHAIR—I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings on the 2006-07 budget estimates for the Community Services and Children's portfolios. I welcome the Hon. Cheryl Garbutt MP, Minister for Community Services, Ms Patricia Faulkner, secretary, Department of Human Services, Mr Arthur Rogers, executive director, disability services, and Mr Alan Hall, acting executive director, financial and corporate services, from the Department of Human Services. I also welcome other departmental officers, members of the public and the media. In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public they cannot participate in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers, as requested by the minister or her chief of staff, can approach the table during the hearings. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and witnesses will be provided with proof versions of their transcripts early next week. After receipt, you have two working days to comment upon them. I will hand over to the minister for a brief presentation on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the Community Services portfolio, thank you.

Ms GARBUTT—Thank you, Chair. I will start with a presentation that covers some of our achievements to date and our strategies for moving forward.

Overheads shown.

Ms GARBUTT—These have been expressed in A Fairer Victoria and A Fairer Victoria: progress and next steps, which we recently released. I will then go through the priorities for this year, which are set out in the budget, and give you some information about the budget context.

A Fairer Victoria covers new legislation that members will all have familiarised themselves with. This is going to actively encourage much more individually focused support to ensure that Victorians with a disability have more control over their own lives. In a nutshell, that is what it is about. At the same time, it provides for more scrutiny and accountability and has various provisions and safeguards. It acknowledges and respects the important role that families and carers play in the lives of people with disabilities and it outlines how we will establish the new Disability Services Commissioner to help people with complaints about disability services get a hearing. It also creates an Office of Senior Practitioner to provide additional protection and services for those people with complex needs.

The third slide—A Fairer Victoria—gives you a look back. It is the move to support people more flexibly in the community. That has been driven by the introduction of Support and Choice over the past few years. We have now provided Support and Choice packages to over 1,500 people. In 2006-07 \$41.3 million is going to be spent supporting over 1,900 people through Support and Choice. These are flexible packages of support that are very important. Families and carers, particularly older carers, have benefited from the increase in respite services. You can see there that continually growing graph that demonstrates exactly what we put in place. Works are occurring right across the state to improve the quality and the standard of shared supported accommodation. You can see the figures there indicating what stage we are at. The picture there is of a CRU in Cypress Avenue, Glen Waverley, but there are similar works taking place right across the state. The first new house is about to be completed.

You can see our priorities for 2006-07 listed there. The Disability Housing Trust was officially launched last week, and that will be pivotal in diversifying the options that are available for accommodation. I would like to highlight the Office for Disability, which was announced in A Fairer Victoria: progress and next steps. That will put issues affecting people with disabilities on the agenda right across government. It is a whole-of-government approach, and it will promote change across all government departments. It will certainly help to make public service infrastructure and programs more accessible to all Victorians with a disability. The office itself will be located in the Department for Victorian Communities and will report to the Minister for Community Services.

I will not go through all of the disability support services but I will mention Changing Days. This is a new

program, with funding of \$1 million. It will establish partnerships with community sector organisations. It aims to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the arts, culture, sport and recreation. It is a more flexible, individualised focus for day programs. Chair, you would be familiar with what we are doing in Coburg, which is perhaps a beacon for how we are going to do that.

In relation to ongoing Futures for Young Adults support, there is funding in this budget of \$3.05 million to support 200 participants in that program to transition into ongoing day activities. I will talk more about young people in residential care later on, but it is to commence the first stage of a \$60 million matched program with the Commonwealth that arose from the COAG recommendations. It is to provide alternative accommodation for young people who are currently in residential aged care, but also to minimise future admissions into that sort of accommodation and to enhance the support of young people who remain in residential aged care. The community facility redevelopment is a \$5 million capital program. This is to enhance the community infrastructure around the place, such as leisure centres and swimming pools and so on, so that people with disabilities can participate alongside other members of the community.

In relation to the budget context, our commitment to disability services translates into more services, despite funding of just 14 per cent from the Commonwealth government through the CSTDA, which is a very low percentage. Victoria is the blue bar on that first chart. It outperforms New South Wales, Queensland and the national average in the amount of service users per 1,000 potential population in terms of accommodation, community support, community access and respite, so they are very good figures. On the bottom of the chart, in terms of expenditure, you can see that Victoria again—in true blue—has the highest average expenditure per capita of potential population. That is something to be proud of, I think.

The final slide in this section demonstrates the growth in funding. This is the first time we are over a \$1 billion budget in disability services. You can see, from the maroon section of the graph, that the bulk of our spending is still directed towards residential accommodation support—that output group—which includes shared supported accommodation, CRUs and congregate care. In recent years the growth has been directed more towards the individually tailored supports—those that enable people to choose the sorts of supports that they require to live in the community—and the individual support output group has grown by 341 per cent under this government. That is obviously the key change in focus.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Minister, for such a concise presentation. If you wish, your overheads can go on the website with your transcript.

Ms GARBUTT—Yes.

The CHAIR—In relation to Budget Paper No. 3, page 79, reference is made to managing demand for services. This committee has been interested for some time in the service needs register. Could you please advise the committee on initiatives that are contained in this budget that meet the managing demand for services strategy.

Ms GARBUTT—Certainly. We are, as I have said, increasingly providing more flexible approaches to meet the needs of people with disabilities, giving them more choice themselves, and people are now being offered individually tailored and flexible options to help them to achieve their own goals. Clearly, demand pressures are continuing to grow. That is an issue in every state and territory throughout the country, and throughout the developed world, in fact. There are estimates by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that indicate the number of people with a severe or profound disability is increasing significantly, primarily as a result of the ageing of the Australian population. I regularly release the service needs register, and it does indicate a changing situation.

I hasten to add that many people on that register are already receiving support and they are often requesting alternative or additional services. As well as that, people should note that these are applications, not necessarily different individuals, and as I said most of them are already receiving some services. It is interesting to note the change in the number of applications for shared supported accommodation, which went down by 9.4 per cent between December 2004 and December 2005. That is a result of initiatives that we have undertaken to support people who wish to move from shared supported accommodation or are choosing different options through the Support and Choice program. So we are rebalancing and reorienting the mix in

the future. The Support and Choice packages are providing alternative options.

We are supporting carers through additional respite and through other early intervention measures. The Signposts program is a good one there, which prevents the development of challenging behaviours in children so that parents can manage them much more easily. Rural access and metro access are about building community capacity to support people in the community and it is about increasing access to community infrastructure—your local swimming pool—rather than specialist services. All of these are reflected in the movements on the service needs register.

Innovation accommodation grants: we have awarded several of these. Fifteen were awarded last year. They are developing a different range of accommodation options and people are choosing those and being supported in that way rather than the traditional ways. Housing associations are being set up to do exactly the same. We are seeing 100 people supported to move out of shared supported accommodation. This is taking some time but about half of them are now living by themselves. They have chosen that and I think it probably reflects a certain level of frustration by the people actually in shared supported accommodation who want their own home. We are seeing them move out and do that successfully. They are being given a lot of support in the transition. It is being done quite slowly so that it is a very secure move. Of course that has created extra shared supported accommodation capacity.

The SNR is being redeveloped to reflect the more modern way of providing flexible services so that people do not put in multiple applications. We are able to identify the range of services that they need. That will be reflected in a new register. I wonder if Arthur might like to talk about that change. What it has meant is that people on the service needs register are being contacted. They are being much more intensively managed so that they understand the greater range of flexibility of services that are offered to them and they are choosing them. That is a very interesting outcome.

The CHAIR—Mr Rogers, I would appreciate it if you could keep that brief, thank you. We are aiming to have around four minutes per question.

Mr ROGERS—Thank you. The service needs register has been in operation in Victoria for some time. People are entered onto that register through regional processes but really there are only three categories: shared supported accommodation, day programs or home first. What regions have to do is try to fit people into those categories. That has been somewhat prescriptive. It has fitted them into types rather than look at their individual support needs. The disability support register is the same type of process through regions through the new client information system but instead of categorising people against only three areas, regions now talk to people about their individual needs and do not need to categorise against three headings. They can record on that register quite specific things about the support needs of that person. It might well be that they will be needing accommodation and support but it will record whether they need support full time, 24 hours, or some part time, whether they need part-time day activities, if they have an interest in other types of things in terms of living in the community, other options that they might like; so it is a much more flexible recording of that person's individual support needs.

It also can record whether they need support to move from shared support accommodation to less restrictive options, or they need perhaps family support options. It has that ability for workers in regions to work very closely with people who are either in the system now or want to change that or are coming into the support system. We can record it quite specifically for that individual, rather than channel them into only three headings. That is a much more flexible, individualised approach and we can learn much more about the support needs that they wish to have.

Mr FORWOOD—Minister, I think you said 100 people have moved out of shared supported accommodation and I presume that they are now being funded from some other output group?

Ms GARBUTT—Yes, it comes from the Support and Choice rather than from—

Mr FORWOOD—Instead of being funded under residential accommodation support on page 105, I presume they are being funded out of community participation and inclusion or individual support?

Ms GARBUTT—From individual support, yes.

Mr FORWOOD—We could sit down and talk about this for hours, I know. Let me start, Minister, by saying that despite the best efforts of the government and despite the fact that we have now reached \$1 billion on this particular overall output group, the waiting time for someone to get into shared supported accommodation—you advised me in answer to a question on notice last week, I think—is 218 weeks or four years. Given that you also advised me in answer to some questions on notice that I put that there are 269 carers who are over 70 years of age and 110 who are over 65—in other words, there are 379 of the carers of those people on the four-year waiting list who are over 65. I wonder if you could outline what assistance you are providing to lifelong carers of people on a four-year waiting list for shared supported accommodation?

Ms GARBUTT—As I indicated, we are moving towards expanding the range of supports., including the accommodation options. Support and Choice, as an example, does provide accommodation support. Accommodation support can be more frequent respite, it can be aids and equipment, it can be recreational or day programs for the person with the disability. It can be leisure time. It could be a holiday away for two weeks. It can be employment for the person with a disability that keeps them engaged in their local community and of course gives spare time to the carer. It can be all of these things. I showed you the figures on respite as an example. That is a major growth in our area with the Commonwealth introducing its funding as well as the state matching it. So shared supported accommodation really does not reflect either the range of supports that they are getting or the range of supports that they particularly want.

We are finding, when the department talks to people about the bigger range of possibilities under Support and Choice, that people are very satisfied with being able to identify what best suits them, what best meets their goals—for the person with the disability, their carer and their family—and opting for a whole range of things which do not come under the heading of shared supported accommodation at all. With the accommodation innovations programs, for example, we are finding that people are choosing a whole range of different accommodation options that we have never supplied in the past. They are going into public housing or family managed housing or they are renting accommodation. They are renting with friends.

There are a whole range of options that quite clearly governments do not provide but other organisations do, and people with disabilities and their carers are choosing to enter into those. Looking at the shared supported accommodation lists, as you do, it reflects a very old way of categorising. It says, 'Right, here's three services. Fit yourself into them.' We have found that people do not like them. They like to have a broader range of choice and so our Support and Choice packages and HomeFirst, which is a very similar idea, are meeting people's needs. We are seeing a lot more of that being exercised and people are choosing that. That is why you see the shared supported accommodation lists going down.

Mr FORWOOD—You have exactly the same output measure this year as last year. Presumably you are taking them off the waiting list, so there is still a demand for shared supported accommodation.

Ms GARBUTT—As I said, there is a growing demand across the country because of the ageing population but also for some other reasons. I will ask Arthur to give you a bit more detail about the older carer support packages.

Mr FORWOOD—Yes.

The CHAIR—You have got a program called Older Support, have you?

Ms GARBUTT—Yes.

The CHAIR—You call it that?

Mr ROGERS—It is delivered through individual packages.

Mr FORWOOD—Is that individual support packages?

Mr ROGERS—Yes. In the last three budgets there has been a specific allocation for older carer

support packages and they have been delivered through that. We have tried to deliver it through that area because it is less confusing to people to set up new programs, but it has been specifically allocated to looking at older carers. That has been about assisting families or parents of adult children with a disability. That has been specifically targeted to older carers.

Mr FORWOOD—Sorry. Of the \$141 million in the individual support, how much is being allocated to that category and how many people is it reaching?

Mr ROGERS—I do not have those figures here.

Mr FORWOOD—Can you get them for us? Thank you.

The CHAIR—If you look on the second page, third slide, there is reference to 'additional respite' with a focus on older carers—565.

Mr FORWOOD—I am after the total amount of people receiving the older support packages, and how much of the individual support—\$141.1 million—is being spent on that particular group.

Mr ROGERS—The age of the people we would record would be the person receiving the service and we, therefore, would need to just check on the age of their parents but that is—

Mr FORWOOD—I will tell you what, if they are old, their parents are older.

Mr ROGERS—That is right, yes. That is true. I was referring to the individual packages. As the chair just mentioned, there is the other program, the respite program for older carers, which was announced I think last year, and that's the joint Commonwealth-state program through the respite activity, and that is specifically to provide additional respite to older carers. That has been implemented through last year and this year. There are those two specific programs, as well as obviously with individual planning we are more able to work with older carers around planning for the future for their sons and daughters. As the minister mentioned earlier, whilst those people may be on a support needs register, they will be receiving some support; most people on the register classified as urgent will be receiving some support.

Ms GARBUTT—Our funding for respite has more than doubled since 1999. It does include that Commonwealth component, but that is only a small part. Funding for older carers: we are actively seeking to contact those people. We are linking up with day programs, home and community care, Commonwealth carers respite services, to try and get the word out. We have delivered brochures and information sheets to health and aged care services, to local government hospitals; all of those sorts of places where you would expect to see ageing carers using those services. They have been advertised through the local media, and we are promoting and advertising in places like pharmacies and local bowling clubs, and bingo halls et cetera. We are very determined that people will take up this offer; it is a very good one.

The CHAIR—At what age do you get classified as an 'older' carer?

Mr FORWOOD—I wouldn't be that rude! You and I qualify!

Ms GARBUTT—Perhaps it is by self-identification. I do not know. There will be an official line.

Mr ROGERS—Somewhat older than I am. The Commonwealth would define it as 70-plus. In terms of their program, they would ask us to say that 70-plus would be the older carer category that they wish us to target the respite funding for.

Ms GARBUTT—We have asked them to be a bit flexible.

The CHAIR—Do you have any funding notes to tell us what might be the cost of being in supported accommodation versus what might be the cost when people decide to live more independently, and thus your ability to be able to do more for more people? Do you have those figures by any chance?

Ms GARBUTT—They both vary. The reality is that shared supported accommodation depends on the needs of the people living in them; whether they need it overnight, for example, and of course the Support and Choice packages are designed—

The CHAIR—Thanks. Ms Romanes.

Ms ROMANES—Minister, on page 23 of Budget Paper No. 3 is a government commitment outlined of \$21 million over four years to reduce the number of young people with a disability living in residential aged care facilities. It is suggested that that will happen through alternatives and other choices. Can you outline for the committee how this program will be implemented in Victoria?

Ms GARBUTT—I have for quite a while now been very actively seeking the support of the Commonwealth government in addressing the issue of young people in nursing homes or in residential aged care. It is generally an inappropriate placement for younger people and COAG at the end of last year reached an agreement about a program. It is \$60.2 million over five years, fifty-fifty funding—state and Commonwealth—from 1 July of this year. It aims to reduce the number of younger people with disabilities in residential aged care. Initially, the priority will be for people less than 50 years, and obviously that leaves a big question mark for those over 50. There will be three elements to the initiative: assisting the younger people that are currently living in residential aged care to move out into more suitable accommodation with the appropriate supports, and they need often both nursing support and disability supports. That is why both governments need to be part of it: we supply the disability supports; the Commonwealth has the responsibility for providing the nursing supports. Having them shift out is the first one.

The second priority is to try and prevent further admissions, so that both state and federal governments are able to pool their funding and support the person, without having to go into residential aged care. The third part is better support for the younger people who remain in residential aged care, if that is their choice, or if there is no other accommodation available. Each state will manage their own particular program. Here of course it covers a number of DHS programs—disability services but also aged care and metropolitan health and aged care. We are at the stage of negotiating for the bilateral agreement between the state and the Commonwealth. There are a lot of vague areas, I would have to say. There is no capital from the Commonwealth in that funding. We have to find that, and will. The amount of money that they are talking about coming out with the person as they exit the residential aged care is not as much as they are spending on them in the aged care, so that is an issue that we are negotiating.

It leaves blank the whole question of those people who are over 50, and money for new growth in the system, more people who need this care, is also not yet pinned down. The bilateral agreement will be around all of those issues, but it is a very positive first step and delivers some money where there has not been funding in the past.

Mr FORWOOD—Minister, on 24 February this year, your chief of staff Steve Cusworth retrenched two of your office staffers: Stacey Robertson, who was at the time 3½ months pregnant and had been a public servant for 16½ years and with whom I had worked in Premier and Cabinet, last century; and Helen Love. I understand that Ms Robertson has taken this matter to equal opportunity. I wonder if you could outline the reasons that you decided that Mrs Love and Stacey Robertson were unsuitable to work in your office?

The CHAIR—Minister, my understanding is that staff are employed under Premier and Cabinet.

Ms GARBUTT—Correct.

The CHAIR—They are employed under Premier and Cabinet funding? Correct? Then you only have to make any comment in relation to budget allocations to you in your responsibility as minister.

Mr FORWOOD—Let me clarify the issue. I have a letter, dated 7 February from the Office of the Minister for Children, Office of the Minister for Community Services signed by Steve Cusworth, chief of staff, addressed to Tim Pallas, chief of staff of the Office of the Premier. It says:

With a change of work priorities this year, this role will be significantly restructured to focus on political oversight,

management and campaigning.

I put it to you that what happened was, after attempts made in 2004 and 2005, in this election year you decided that you would have retrenched two people who had done nothing other than a proper job for you?

The CHAIR—And you did make reference to equal opportunity?

Mr FORWOOD—I did.

The CHAIR—Is there a case before the Equal Opportunity Commission?

Mr FORWOOD—There is a conciliation hearing taking place on the 7th and I have the permission of the person who is involved in it to ask questions about it because she wants to know why she was given the hatchet job. And I think after 16½ years in the Public Service and a right to return which was not offered to her, she has every right to have these matters investigated by this committee in this forum.

The CHAIR—Mr Forwood, I am not deaf. I might be slightly hearing impaired but I am not deaf so you do not need to shout.

Mr FORWOOD—All right, I will not.

The CHAIR—Secondly, if there is a matter that is going before conciliation—

Mr FORWOOD—It is not sub judice.

The CHAIR—I am advising the Minister that she only needs to comment in relation to the matters that she wishes to, conscious of that conciliation under way. Thank you.

Ms GARBUTT—Just to clarify, ministers' staff are employed by DPC, so this is not a matter of my portfolio. I would say—

Mr FORWOOD—You did not fire them?

Mr MERLINO—Let the Minister answer the question.

Ms GARBUTT—Calm down, Bill. Do not put on a show. Any matters such as this would always be dealt with by my office with sensitivity, appropriately and with confidentiality. I think confidentiality is probably the key word here, so I just stress again: any matters such as this would be dealt with appropriately. Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr FORWOOD—After 16½ years she was given an eight-week payout and shown the door and you think that is acceptable behaviour?

The CHAIR—Mr Merlino.

Mr MERLINO—The question has been answered, Bill.

Ms GARBUTT—I have answered the question. Just calm down.

The CHAIR—Mr Merlino, the next question, please.

Mr MERLINO—Thank you. Minister, I refer you to page 103 of Budget Paper No. 3 and the number of clients accessing aids and equipment which is just over 24,000. Can you inform the committee what investment the government has made in this area to address the demand?

Ms GARBUTT—Aids and Equipment is a very important program of course, providing that in a timely and a quality way it enables people with disabilities and frail aged to live as independently as possible at home and participate in the community, so it is fundamental to what we are striving to do within the State Disability Plan. Last year's budget provided an additional \$7.5 million to the Aids and Equipment program over four years and there is an increase in this year's budget of \$900,000. As well, there was a non-recurrent allocation of \$5 million in the 2004-05 state budget. Just a couple of weeks ago I was also able to announce a big increase of non-recurrent funds, a \$2.7 million allocation which will see aids and equipment delivered to around 3½ thousand people. It is a major program, around \$21 million per annum now.

Of the \$2.7 million extra that I announced, \$2 million was for aids and equipment and home modifications for about 2,600 people across Victoria. There was \$150,000 for domiciliary oxygen and obviously people cannot wait for that particular assistance; \$130,000 for breast prostheses for 378 women across Victoria; and \$400,000 for the Royal Children's Hospital to provide equipment for about 345 Victorian children. We have seen sustained decrease in the number of people on waiting lists for those particular pieces of equipment.

We are also reviewing the Aids and Equipment program. There have been a number of technological changes, for example, and a number of price increases. We want to ensure that the program does provide the optimum outcomes for people who are participating in that program. We want to see that we are getting the best value, that we are supporting them in the best way possible. The program does include home modifications, for example, so these are very important items indeed. We have 29 issuing centres across the state, including four statewide providers. It continues to grow as a program because of extra needs relating to the ageing of the population, advances in technology, our emphasis on getting people out into the community and participating there and improving the inclusiveness of the community itself. It is growing in numbers, in size, in dollar terms and in the range of equipment that it provides, so it is a very important program and one that we see as vital to underpinning that community participation and inclusion focus that we have in our disability services.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD—I would like to return to the sacking of Stacey Robertson and Helen Love. In Mr Cusworth's letter to Tim Pallas he says, 'Once we move to the new office, we will have a centralised receptionist.' Have you moved to the new office?

Ms GARBUTT—I am not going to go into this issue any further.

Mr FORWOOD—It is a legitimate—

Ms GARBUTT—I said it would be treated with some sensitivity and that is what I am doing.

Mr FORWOOD—Let me rephrase the question. Have you moved to your new office?

Ms GARBUTT—Yes, thank you.

Mr FORWOOD—When did you move?

Ms GREEN—Are you interested in the disability portfolio?

Mr FORWOOD—Absolutely I am interested in the disability portfolio.

Ms GREEN—No, you are not, otherwise you would ask some questions of substance for the disabled people of Victoria.

Mr FORWOOD—I will back my record against yours any day of the week. Are we going to be allowed to ask the minister questions about the cost of fighting these matters?

Ms GARBUTT—About the budget estimates, I would have thought.

Mr FORWOOD—What is the cost of fighting Stacey Robertson's unfair dismissal and what

portfolio and which output group is it coming from?

Ms GARBUTT—As I have already said, employment is a matter for DPC.

Mr MERLINO—That is right. You know the answer to that.

Ms GARBUTT—Any such issues would be handled there. I absolutely reject your comments about sacking two people.

Mr FORWOOD—You can reject them. They happen to be true.

Ms GARBUTT—Bill, they are not and you are making false claims again.

Mr FORWOOD—Oh, yes? In March 2004—

Ms GARBUTT—It is not to do with the budget, is it, Bill?

Mr FORWOOD—Yes, it is—absolutely.

The CHAIR—The question now goes to Mr Somyurek.

Mr FORWOOD—He advised me that the minister wanted him to get rid of Mrs Love.

Mr SOMYUREK—Thank you, Chair. Minister, I refer you to page 104 of Budget Paper No. 3, which refers to the number of clients participating in day care activities. Can you please outline to the committee the reforms planned to reshape participation in day activities?

Ms GARBUTT—Sorry. Page 104 of the budget paper?

Mr SOMYUREK—Yes, Budget Paper No. 3.

Ms GARBUTT—The budget shows that we are going to be providing just over \$4 million over the next four years to enhance our day programs through the Changing Days initiative. This is a new program, so the \$4 million is recurrent and there is \$5 million in capital as well to support that change. Changing Days sees the department partnering up with community service organisations, and we already have an example with Scope, the former Spastic Society, where we will be able to increase the opportunities for people with disability to participate in a range of programs. The existing one is in leisure programs, in swimming and in gym work, but it could also be in the arts or cultural programs—a whole range of leisure activities—and employment opportunities.

We are going to establish some demonstration projects and it will see a flexible mix of services. Perhaps if I describe the two existing ones with Scope, it will be more understandable. The one at Olympic Village in Heidelberg West takes the old Olympic swimming pool—which was, in fact, the training pool for the Olympians that were here in 1956. The pool is still there. It was pretty run down, and facilities around it were in pretty poor condition as well. The department partnered with Scope to smarten up the facilities, to refurbish them, and to bring in a whole range of programs for people with disability, and they participate there now during the day, alongside members of the public. It is the classic win-win situation. People with disability are participating with the public; the public get better facilities; the pool looks terrific; the surrounding gym is looking much better than it has since about 1966. It really is a great example of this sort of approach.

There is another one taking place in the chair's electorate, with Scope, where we are looking for similar sorts of outcomes. We are encouraging the day service agencies to adopt that sort of approach. They will be much more tailored to the interests and needs of people with disability, but it will build stronger links with the generic service, the community services that are already on the ground that everybody is participating in. It is part of fostering that whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach, because we are saying, 'It's not just about supporting people with disabilities much better in a much more flexible way, but also about making the community much more inclusive and expecting to see people with disabilities participating

alongside them. In these sorts of examples they actually will be participating. Arthur, do you want to add something to that?

Mr ROGERS—Thank you, Minister. The funding has also enabled Scope to cease using two disability day program facilities that were only for disability clients. Rather than directing the funding to upgrading or replacing disability day programs, the funding was directed to working with community organisations to make renting facilities available to people with a disability and, I guess in a sense, it is reverse integration in that way.

The CHAIR—Mr Clark.

Mr CLARK—My question relates to your slide which is the top side on page 4 of the handout—I am not quite sure what that translates to in your individual slides—the box that relates to the number of service users per 1,000 of potential population on various measures. As you probably know, a number of the indicators in that chart are also reported in the Report on Government Services. The latest published Report on Government Services relates to 2003-04 rather than 2004-05, as you have. There are some fairly marked differences between the data as contained in the Report on Government Services for 2003-04 and the numbers that you have there for 2004-05. Can you tell the committee the source of the data that you have used in your chart and, secondly—perhaps on notice—could you provide the committee with a time series of the measures that you have used; in other words, the various measures going back for as many years as you are able?

Ms GARBUTT—I will ask Arthur to come in on that.

Mr ROGERS—The source of the data is the report on government services 2006.

Mr CLARK—I have that on the screen here, and that only has data up to 2003-04.

Mr ROGERS—I would have to check that, Mr Clark, but that is the source that I have on my information here. The second part of your question was looking at comparisons between trend data and the—

Mr CLARK—Yes. Can you provide us equivalent numbers going back in time as far as you have the data?

Mr ROGERS—We would obviously be able to extract that from the reports on government services. This is the continued source of data, so we would be able to extract it from that, but we have no other source of data.

The CHAIR—You will take that on notice. Mr Baxter has a clarification.

Mr BAXTER—Could you give me the definition of 'potential population'? It is used twice in that slide.

Mr ROGERS—'Potential population' is data extracted through the ABS statistics, and it is basically taken from census data, but it is estimates of the number of people with disability collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Through the Commonwealth and the states we develop data estimates of the number of people with disability from that, and it is acceptable in terms of the national basis of data. It is estimates of the number of people with disability in terms of severe and profound disability, but they are not the department's estimates. They are the national estimates.

The CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr CLARK—Can I just clarify? You undertake to get back to us to confirm the source of the data that was in the slide?

Mr ROGERS—Yes.

The CHAIR—We now move to Ms Green.

Ms GREEN—Thank you, Chair. Minister, page 79 of Budget Paper No. 3 refers to the Department of Human Services acting sooner and more effectively, including delivering of services around people and place. Could you inform the committee of plans for people with a disability to purchase services and supports directly, please?

Ms GARBUTT—Yes. A Fairer Victoria talks about reforming the way that we support people with disability to ensure maximum choice and opportunity. We are looking at new ways to be more flexible in order to deliver choice and opportunities. It is about people having a say in determining their futures. Direct payments is one such approach, where payments would go directly to the person with a disability so that they can choose, arrange and purchase their own supports without going through a disability agency or a broker or anything else. It would, of course, be in line with the goals that they have identified in their individual plan. It gives direct control of their funding to people with disability and it is much more flexible. If their needs change, it can be changed as well. It expands the range of options that they have in managing their supports and managing their individualised planning support approach.

In January of this year, disability services commenced a project to develop and trial direct payments with a small group of people with disabilities, with their families and their carers or guardians or administrators—whichever is appropriate. That is in the southern metropolitan region. There will be a six-month trial of that project through this year and then we will undertake an evaluation of it. It has been tried in some other places. It has been used in the United States and Canada since the seventies, in fact. It has been a more recent development in Europe. Here in Australia, Western Australia has been using direct payments known as consumer managed funding for over 10 years and in Victoria the Transport Accident Commission has moved to this style of funding. It is known there as self purchasing and since January of 2005 has become the standard business practice at TAC.

The research that has followed those sorts of trials has demonstrated that it has many benefits, including improved self esteem, improved relationships and new vocational lifestyle opportunities opening up, because people can think of many more things that they want to do than the department can, and it has contributed to a reduction in the supports that people need in order to maintain their independence and active participation in the community. It has been trialled and run successfully elsewhere, so we are trialling it here. It is not for everybody, I would hasten to add. It is not something that everyone would want to or need to or should participate in, but we are trialling it to see what the results are here. It is being done very carefully in very small groups, and we will be evaluating it.

The CHAIR—We will take a break.

The bells having been rung—

Hearing suspended.

The CHAIR—Okay, we will resume. Mr Baxter.

Mr BAXTER—Thank you. Minister, for my edification at least, would you draw a distinction between the program you operate, Shared Supported Accommodation, which you have referred to several times today, and that operated by your colleague the Minister for Housing, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. Is there any duplication in those two programs, or are they entirely different?

Ms GARBUTT—I can describe Shared Supported Accommodation. I am not so familiar with the other minister's portfolio area. Perhaps Patricia Faulkner could deal with that. Shared Supported Accommodation generally is community residential units, where typically five people with a disability live. They have supports from disability workers, and the amount of that support depends on the severity of their disabilities. It is their home and is typically a house in the suburbs. They live there, they often go to work or they participate in day programs or leisure activities, according to their wishes. They are supported by staff either from disability services or from community service organisations, such as Yooralla and Scope. Indeed, many of our community residential units are operated by community sector organisations. They are very similar, but the government would fund those organisations and the support that is in them. SAAP in contrast?

Ms FAULKNER—SAAP provides services largely to people who are listed as homeless and who are in crisis, so that it generally applies to a particular kind group.

Mr FORWOOD—The first one is for disabled people and the other one is for homeless people.

Ms FAULKNER—That is correct.

Mr BAXTER—It seems to me they can be very similar. If you look at the case that is in today's paper, many of those people would have disabilities, I would have thought, and I am trying to make the distinction, because I did not get a satisfactory answer at question time today.

Ms GARBUTT—Mr Rogers might be able to help.

The CHAIR—Mr Rogers.

Mr ROGERS—I will amplify around Shared Supported Accommodation. These are group homes for people with a disability. They enter through the disability support system, so they need to have a severe and profound disability and they need to have quite a high level of support needs. They then enter a home, which is basically a rostered unit that is staffed 24 hours a day to provide them with support. They are there because they cannot manage in housing with less support than that. There are people with a disability who might live in ordinary housing or housing made available through the Office of Housing, but they do not need the level of support that they would get through shared supported accommodation, which is 24-hour support by disability-trained staff through the government and non-government sectors. I think the distinction is around the intensity of support, the requirement for support and support needs.

Mr BAXTER—Thank you. That is helpful.

The CHAIR—Minister, in Budget Paper No. 3, page 105, there is reference to the Disability Housing Trust. Could you outline to the committee the progress on new developments in relation to this trust.

Ms GARBUTT—Certainly. The Disability Housing Trust is a key body that we hope will increase housing choice and provide more opportunities for people with disabilities to live in the community. The main form of accommodation, as we know, has been the community based unit, the CRU, but the trust will offer greater choice and greater diversity in accommodation options. This is absolutely in line with the State Disability Plan. It is about broadening the options available to people with disabilities.

This is going to be a charitable trust. It is not a government statutory authority. It will operate as the property holder and will promote, sponsor and try to develop new housing options. The government has committed \$10 million in funding to it and has asked that it deliver 100 new housing opportunities of different sorts. We are not describing them as units or houses or such like. We hope that the trust will leverage additional capital through a range of what are at this stage potential partners. That could include families, not-for-profit housing providers, disability support agencies, local government, the private sector, superannuation funds, churches and a whole range of organisations that we think will be interested.

The one that is most familiar—and, indeed, that I get most queries from—is families, who will often say, 'We have a family home. We would like to ensure that our son or daughter, when we go, has this home and is able to live in it with supports.' Previously we had not been able to take up those offers, partly because the old community residential unit model meant that the support came with the house. Now that we have Support and Choice, which is a package of support that is able to go with the person with the disability, they can take that package of support to a rental house or public housing or whatever. It means that the person with a package of support could go to a family home and get other people with packages of support living there as well. Of course, people are not very happy with leaving a house to the government—that does not make a lot of sense—but leaving it to a charitable trust has that potential. Churches, for example, have offered property and houses. They do not want to offer them to the government either, but they will offer them to a charitable trust. Superannuation funds have funds to invest and they are often happy to invest in this form of very stable bricks and mortar investment, but somehow we have to make it work so that they get a return. There are a lot of

potential partners out there, but the trust itself needs to establish those.

I formed the inaugural board of directors in February this year and launched it last week, on 5 June. It has a board of directors as well as members. The board has people with a great variety of knowledge and experience across finance, housing, disability and a whole range of different skills that will need to be brought to this board, because it is not just about disability. It is about housing, planning, charitable trusts, finance and partnership arrangements with a whole range of players. I think it will have a key role in generating both community and private sector investment and broadening the range of housing options so that people with disabilities have a range of choice that they do not have now. It is about broadening those options and allowing them to live in the community with independence and choice that they themselves have control over.

The CHAIR—Minister, you might like to take this on notice, but do you intend to get the Office of Housing in DHS, which has done much planning and architectural work on accommodation and ranges of accommodation, to provide their work free of charge to the Disability Housing Trust in order to cut down expenditure on something they are basically duplicating that is already available?

Ms GARBUTT—I will take that on notice. I do not consider that they are duplicating the work, because it is a different role, but there might be some possibility—

The CHAIR—Architecturally.

Ms GARBUTT—Yes, we can focus on that.

The CHAIR—Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD—Thank you. Minister, section 49(2) of the Disability Act says that a disability service provider who receives a request may agree to it or refuse it.

Ms GARBUTT—Receives a request for what, sorry?

Mr FORWOOD—This is the new act; accessing disability services. A person with a disability may request a service provider. The service provider can say yes or no. That is how the new act works.

Ms GARBUTT—That is one clause in a very large act—

Mr FORWOOD—This is about accessing disability services.

Ms GARBUTT—It has 240 pages. There are hundreds of clauses, and you read out one and say that is how the new act works. I think you need to read a bit more of it.

Mr FORWOOD—Page 58 of the act. Mr Rogers knows what I am talking about because we have talked about it in the past.

Ms GARBUTT—I know what you are talking about.

Mr FORWOOD—Good.

Ms GARBUTT—But you are distorting and misleading, are you not?

Mr FORWOOD—No, I am not.

Ms GARBUTT—I think you are.

The CHAIR—Could we get to the question?

Mr BAXTER—I cannot make a judgment until he spells it out.

Mr FORWOOD—So if a disability service provider receives a request they can agree to it or not agree to it. The southern metropolitan region has distributed a request for people to join their registration and priority access panels. So part of my question is: how do they fit in with the system, and will they be paid for doing this work? But the thing that intrigues me more is that in this document it says that the registration panel is responsible for confirming the nature of a person's request and making a decision to register the request. If it is the responsibility under the act for a disability service provider to do that, why is the department establishing a registration organisation that, according to this, will decide whether or not someone goes on the DSR?

Ms GARBUTT—I will ask Mr Rogers to explain that.

The CHAIR—Before you do, do you know what Mr Forwood is referring to?

Mr ROGERS—No.

The CHAIR—It might be helpful if we could have a copy so that Mr Rogers knows to what you are referring.

Mr FORWOOD—It came off the web, Arthur.

Mr ROGERS—I have not seen the particulars of this document, but broadly I would say what this document refers to is a current process that the region is undertaking in terms of determining its priorities for services in that region. It is not actually operating under the Disability Services Act, which will not come into force until the middle of next year. The current IDPSA and the DSA are silent on regional processes. So there are a number of different regional processes where regions establish a priority panel to work out who might go on the service need register or the disability support register.

Operating under the current system the new act will require the change of a number of policies and processes. We will be working with regions and community services organisations over the next 12 months to implement new processes consistent with the new act. So the document you have is not actually under the Disability Act 2006 because it is not in.

Mr FORWOOD—But it refers to the disability support register, does it not?

Mr ROGERS—It does. The disability support register is the replacement for the service needs register. It is being introduced now, not as—

Mr FORWOOD—But that is not part of the act.

Mr ROGERS—The act does not refer to the disability support register, but the register will enable us to lawfully comply with the Disability Act. But the disability support register is a new process that is being introduced now. It has been introduced in southern because they were piloting the process.

Mr FORWOOD—So if these people do this, they would only have one year of work because under the new regime, from 1 July next year, you will be switching to section 49(2) of the act. Secondly, will they be paid for doing this work for the next year?

Mr ROGERS—In relation to the first point you make, it is intended that when the new act comes in the department will still run a disability support register. The entry for services such as Shared Supported Accommodation and individual packages will still be through our regional process. So we are not intending to change that departmental process which acts as the gateway to higher cost services such as Shared Supported Accommodation. So they may continue that, but we need to discuss it with the region. About the nature of the funding for these positions, I would have to take that on notice because I do not know.

The CHAIR—Thank you. Ms Romanes.

Ms ROMANES—Minister, with respect to the Shared Supported Accommodation measure on

page 105 of Budget Paper No. 3, can you advise on progress of the capital works program to improve the quality of shared supported accommodation for people accessing these services?

Ms GARBUTT—Yes. This was one of the slides that we showed you; slide No. 4 on my presentation. It goes back to A Fairer Victoria; the government social action policy statement that we released last year where we undertook to refurbish and renew a lot of our shared supported accommodation residential facilities. The 2005-06 budget allocated nearly \$40 million—\$39.5 million over three years—for the refurbishment of 20 houses and the replacement of 27 houses. That builds on \$10 million that was provided in the previous budget for priority upgrades across our government owned shared supported accommodation. So the \$10 million priority works is fully committed, and that program is well under way. All the works have commenced. In fact, 75 per cent of them are completed.

The \$40 million refurbishment and renewal program is also well advanced. Twenty of the refurbishment projects are at the planning stage. All 27 new buildings are currently at design, tender or construction stages. These are houses right across the state. They are not in a particular area. They are, of course, very important in terms of providing quality accommodation for people with a disability, but also providing a safe working place for their carers and the workers in those facilities. They have to reflect the best standards available, particularly taking into account the occupational health and safety requirements, and also the amenity of the accommodation.

As a part of implementing this program, which is a very large one, the department did develop accommodation standards and guidelines for shared support accommodation. They have to, and do, comply with the occupational health and safety with the Building Code of Australia and other standards. But it does also consider the specific needs of people with a disability. If we go back a little, the majority of shared supported accommodation started to be developed in the mid eighties with the round of de-institutionalisation. It was often spot purchased residential accommodation. So it is getting on now. But, as well, there have been significant changes to the building regulations governing accommodation for people with a disability, so we did have to reassess the stock and bring it all up to requirements and that has been done. Disability services is now finalising a home maintenance guide for these houses as well. So it is good news both for people with disabilities who are living in these houses and for the staff working there. There are considerable staff numbers that we have on the ground now.

Ms ROMANES—Minister, following up on your comments, are you suggesting that the 27 new buildings that are going to tender for construction are to replace current stock, or are some of them going into new areas?

Ms GARBUTT—They are all replacement stock. It reaches a stage where refurbishment is not worthwhile. You are better off to replace it and have very modern, up-to-date stock that will serve the purpose for much longer. So there is an equation that the department does to decide whether to refurbish or to replace. But where they are replacing, it is of existing stock. It does demonstrate the number of community residential units that we have; both secretariat owned and of course there are community service organisations that own those as well. We have 936 dwellings; 509 government and 427 owned by the non-government organisations. They house 4½ thousand people across the state, so it is a very large supply of shared supported accommodation.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Minister. We will have some follow-up questions later in relation to the detail of the expenditure in that renewal program, rather than do that now. Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD—Minister, you might need to take these questions on notice, but let us have a crack at them. Of the billion dollars that is going into disability research this year, do you know how much is being allocated by the eight DHS regions?

Ms GARBUTT—Per region?

Mr FORWOOD—Yes. How much is going to each of the regions?

Ms GARBUTT—How specific?

Mr FORWOOD—Ballpark. I am not asking down to the last dollar.

Ms GARBUTT—We can give you ballpark and perhaps follow up with more specific figures.

Mr FORWOOD—That would be good. Thanks.

Mr ROGERS—So it is about how much is allocated by the regions?

Mr FORWOOD—Well, you have a bucket of funds—a billion dollars or \$1,000,041,000—and you are going to spend it across the state. There are five country regions and three metro regions, and I would like to know how much is going into each of the regions.

Ms FAULKNER—Is that for both the money that they use themselves to provide shared supported accommodation and the money that they give to the regions?

Mr FORWOOD—Yes. That is the total amount of your budget. Obviously you will have some head office expenses and stuff like that. For heaven's sake, do not do a lot of work. I just want to know roughly how much is allocated across the state.

Mr ROGERS—As you pointed out, Mr Forwood, the regions are the principal vehicle for the delivery of services, so they are allocated both funding for their direct services that they require and they are also allocated funding for the services that we fund through community service organisations. What is not allocated to them, as you point out, is head office expenses. But there are also some programs that we fund centrally.

Mr FORWOOD—Perhaps you could do a little diagram with a balance or a figure that is funded centrally or whatever.

Mr ROGERS—That generally would be the approach. But the great majority of this is through regional offices.

Mr FORWOOD—Yes.

Mr ROGERS—The types of programs that we have centrally—for instance, the housing trust that the minister mentioned—we fund some statewide advocacy programs and peak bodies. They are funded centrally. We also hold some money in terms of the broad capital expenditure that we do that is allocated sometimes directly, and there are some small payments that we make.

Mr FORWOOD—As a subset of that, I am particularly interested in the total amount of the billion dollars that is going on respite and how that slots into each of the eight regions. Most of it will be provided by third parties, but there will be some of course that will be provided by the department.

Mr ROGERS—Regions do provide some respite, but the majority is—

Mr FORWOOD—If you could do that, it would be great.

Mr ROGERS—Generally, we allocate money to regions based on equity formulae, which are based on their share of the population waiting for certain things. That is the broad proposal.

Mr FORWOOD—Yes, I understand.

The CHAIR—If you want to make any comment about large sites—for example, Colac—in particular regions, feel free to do that because that may skew percentages in terms of average population.

Mr ROGERS—It does. Where there is an institution, such as Colanda and Sandhurst that does work. There are historical issues as well.

The CHAIR—I do not want you feeling that you are held to per head of population.

Mr FORWOOD—I am a reasonable man!

The CHAIR—We know how reasonable you are. That is why I made that comment.

Mr ROGERS—Perhaps if I could add that the equity formula is for new funding so there are historical reasons why there are those, as you pointed out. So the equity formula does not actually allocate the total billion dollars. It allocates new money for each year, based on the regional share of population.

Mr FORWOOD—The last part is, can you let us know how much of the billion dollars comes from the feds?

Mr ROGERS—That is approximately 14 per cent.

Mr FORWOOD—Thanks.

The CHAIR—Mr Merlino.

Mr MERLINO—Thanks, Chair. Minister, I refer you to page 20 of Budget Paper No. 3 and the continued investment in A Fairer Victoria. I ask you to inform the committee on the specific initiatives relating to the creation of the Office for Disability as part of the statement.

Mr GARBUTT—A Fairer Victoria, the progress in Next Steps, the second version that we launched on 1 June, made this announcement. The Office for Disability, unlike disability services that we have been talking about here, which are generally for quite severely and profoundly disabled people, but they are perhaps 10 per cent of the disabled population. Most people with disabilities live in their own home and want to access the community, get to work, visit community facilities, and use transport and so on, in the same way that everybody else does. The Office for Disability is about those people and a whole-of-government approach, a whole-of-community approach about making the community much more accessible for people with a disability.

It will be housed within the Department for Victorian Communities, and you would be familiar with the other offices that they have there—Office of Senior Victorians; Office for Youth; Office of Women's Affairs; Ethnic Affairs; Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, and so on. Office for Disability will sit very well in that, and it will focus on other issues, such as accessible transport, accessible public building, accessing the local swimming pool. It is about those sorts of issues, and it will take those issues up across government. It is about local employment opportunities and so on. It has that whole-of-government. It is about putting the issues around disability front and centre on the government's agenda as a priority, and making sure that issues to do with people with a disability are not just confined to disability services division within DHS but that all agencies and departments are aware of people with disabilities and what their needs are.

I think it is a very important step in broadening the government's view and priority for people with disability. The office will take up management of some of the initiatives that this department has been responsible for in the past, ones that focus on making Victoria a more accessible and inclusive community; things like the Companion Card scheme which is very successful and is ultimately about accessibility for people with disabilities into a whole range of events and venues that we all go to. They will be responsible for disability action plans which every government department has either done or is doing, and is required to do, is mandated to do under the new Disability Act, and overseeing implementation. It will be about the community awareness program. The new disability services plan is not just about people with disability; it is about the rest of the community; about the rest of the community understanding that it needs to be inclusive and to encourage their participation, welcome participation of people with disabilities in the community. So a community awareness campaign is very appropriate to make sure that the community changes to accommodate that. That is part of the programs that will be going to the Office for Disability.

The office will answer to the Minister for Community Services which at the moment happens to be me, but it

will be in the Department for Victorian Communities just to recognise that broader viewpoint: that whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach, absolutely in line with the State Disability Plan.

The CHAIR—Thank you. Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD—Thank you. Minister, I want to go back to the issue of access. The document that I have stolen back from Arthur says:

The priority for access panel considers applications on the DSR once a vacancy or funding becomes available and recommends applications to receive support.

The bells having been rung—

Hearing suspended.

The CHAIR—We will keep going because we have nine minutes plus four, so we have 13 minutes more. Anyone with child-care problems, you are going 13 minutes later. We are going back to the beginning of Mr Forwood's question.

Mr FORWOOD—Page 103 of Budget Paper No. 3 shows, under 'Information assessment and planning', eligibility assessments completed in a year: 1,000. I presume that some of those would be new clients being assessed and some will be existing clients being reassessed. However, what we know is that in the southern region they are going to be done by a panel. It appears it is being done by a panel because what it says here is that, 'Once a vacancy for funding becomes available, it recommends applications to receive support.' I am interested to know the relationship between the 1,000 there and the panel here and whether or not there is some sort of appeal mechanism for someone who is aggrieved at the decision of the panel to provide funding or a vacancy once one occurs?

Ms GARBUTT—My understanding is that the panel does not do the assessment. That is done separately. The panel has a subsequent role. I think the best way for us to understand it is to ask Mr Rogers to take us through, step by step, and separate out those two things.

Mr ROGERS—The process under the current act is that the person who contacts the department wishing to receive a service, if they have an intellectual disability—under the IDPSA—they need to be assessed as being eligible under that act. The department does the eligibility assessment.

Mr FORWOOD—So that 1,000 in Budget Paper No. 3 were all new?

Mr ROGERS—They would all be new. There may be occasionally where we have done an assessment and have been asked to redo it; but that is mostly not the case. That is the first issue: they need to be declared eligible under the IDPSA. The department will do that directly or contract that out. The person then is registered as having an intellectual disability, that being defined under the act. Some of those people will then wish to be put on the support needs register, or the DSR as it will be. Many of them will want to be registered but will not say they need a service now and will not request to go on the register, or they might request a service that is not on the register. Those people who are then assessed as eligible, there is a regional process which is through case management and departmental staff and it can be referral by an in-government agency to be placed on the support needs register or the DSR.

When they are placed on, they are placed with a category as you would be aware: urgent, high and low. That then forms the regional list of people who are have priority consideration for a service on the register. The panel comes in when there is a vacancy or new funding. It is the department's approach to have an open and transparent process to this, so rather than a departmental officer making that decision, the panel—which in the southern region I think has asked for people from the community and from providers—will work with the department about looking at who might be the person that will be referred for that next vacancy or for the next amount of funding.

Mr FORWOOD—It is on a needs basis though?

Mr ROGERS—There is a process where the needs of that person are assessed. If there is one vacancy in Mordialloc, then there might be two or three people who might be looking for that and the panel will make a recommendation to the department about who that might be.

Mr FORWOOD—Recommendations to whom?

Mr ROGERS—To the department because at the end of the day it is the department's decision about allocating that position.

Mr FORWOOD—To you or the regional office?

Mr ROGERS—To the regional office and the disability manager or the accommodation manager.

Mr FORWOOD—Will this happen in each of the regions or just southern?

Mr ROGERS—It is happening now mostly in each region. This southern process which we are looking at in other regions is an attempt to open up the process to make it more community based and transparent. So the decision is the department's but based on recommendations from a broader group of people. Obviously the person with the disability and their family has agreed to be part of this process, because there are privacy considerations. There are issues around objective assessment about relative need. It is also about whether the person is right for that particular vacancy: it is in the right place, it is the right mix of people they would be living with and so on, and provides the right support. The department would make that decision. At the moment, if the decision were made and the person felt aggrieved by that, they would make a representation to the department. They could do it to the secretary.

Mr FORWOOD—But how would they know? If you are on a priority access panel and a vacancy becomes available for whatever reason and the panel sits down and decides a difficult choice amongst competing people, how would the people who have been considered even know they have been considered? As far as they know, they are just on a priority list somewhere.

Mr ROGERS—I am not exactly sure of the answer to that question. As I understand it, the region would make contact with people who have expressed an interest in that area, but I would have to check the specifics on that. I guess a person who felt that they were on the list but had not been considered for a vacancy would ask the department. At the moment, they probably could go to the Ombudsman about the department processes and when the Disability Act comes into place next year, they could go to the commission and say, 'The processes aren't fair.' I also point that under the new act, the secretary of the department is required to publish criteria about assessment of relative need and be clear, so people understand how we make those decisions. We have those in different places now but it will be collected and it will be public information: how the department will determine relative need, including these processes and the basis for making that decision and people will have a greater understanding of how they actually get access through that panel process.

Mr FORWOOD—Terrific, thanks.

The CHAIR—We have time for one more question, which will require a three-minute answer, please, Minister. Ms Green.

Ms GREEN—Thank you, Chair. Minister, I refer you to page 104 of Budget Paper No. 3 with respect to clients receiving advocacy services. Could you outline the improvements made by the government to these services in the past year, please.

Ms GARBUTT—The State Disability Plan identifies that we need strong independent advocacy, but also self-advocacy services, and these have been a major commitment by the government on coming into office. Since 2004 we have put in an additional \$1 million for disability advocacy and have established nine new or enhanced advocacy services. Some of these are specialised. We have set up one for women, another for Indigenous Victorians and another for young people, which is one that I announced and launched in April this year especially for young people with disabilities. They are obviously a particular population group on

their own, with their own interests and needs, so that advocacy is different to, say, women's advocacy services. The Youth Disability Advocacy Service is going to be delivered by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Youthlaw and the Disability Discrimination Legal Service. The three of them have gotten together and are responsible for that, and there was great enthusiasm when I launched it.

We are in the process of establishing two new resource units. One is the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit and the other one is the Self-Advocacy Resource Unit. These will sit across the top, in some ways, of the other self-advocacy services. They are going to have a slightly different function. They will work with the other advocacy services, they will make sure that people with disabilities are involved with their operations, they will publish resources for the other advocacy services and they will oversee advocacy practice. They are a resource unit for those other advocacy services. There has been a public call for submissions, and there is quite a lot of interest. We are undertaking the selection process now, and they will be able to announce the providers soon.

Ms GREEN—Thank you.

Mr FORWOOD—Could you make available to the committee a list of the advocacy providers and how much they get.

Ms GARBUTT—Yes. I do not see any problem with that.

Mr FORWOOD—Thank you.

Ms GARBUTT—It will be in stark contrast to advocacy under the previous government, of course, where it was cut down to one service.

Mr FORWOOD—Yes.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much, Minister, for that. I would like to place on record the committee's appreciation to the departmental staff who have prepared the briefing notes for us for the questionnaire that has been completed and to our witnesses here at the table. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.