



ACT Government

2003-2004 BUDGET

BUDGET BOOST FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

The 2003/04 Budget directly supports the Stanhope Government's systematic disability reform agenda – *Steps to Reform* - outlined in its response to the Board of Inquiry into Disability Services, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Bill Wood, said today.

Mr Wood said funding totalling \$6.87 million over four years would be available to directly assist people with a disability in the ACT.

“This new money supplements the additional \$2.5 million provided in the last budget, bringing the total disability budget to approximately \$40 million per annum,” Mr Wood said.

“The Budget initiatives will:

- address unmet needs of people with a disability;
- enhance allied health services for post-school aged adolescents and adults with disabilities; and
- provide an economic incentive for the drivers of wheelchair accessible taxis to encourage them to give priority to people in wheelchairs.

“A total of \$3.9 million over four years (\$600,000 in the first year) is being allocated to meet the high support needs of individuals for whom current services are unable to respond. This funding will be ongoing and will increase in subsequent years.

“The money will provide immediate transitional support for people with disabilities and their families who have reached a personal crisis and need immediate assistance.

“A total of 113 individuals in the ACT currently receive individual support packages worth \$5.27 million per annum. Each individual who receives assistance is likely to require lifetime support.”

Mr Wood said the Budget would also target the provision of professional therapy services.

“A total of \$2.3 million will be provided over four years to enhance allied health services to post-school aged adolescents and adults with disabilities.

“Specifically this funding will facilitate:

- the employment of new therapy staff, including psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech pathologists and physiotherapists;
- the development of services for adolescents: and

Released: 6 May 2003

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Media Release



- the establishment of a specialist *Behaviour Intervention Program* for post-school young people and adults with complex multiple disabilities.”

Mr Wood said the Budget would also fund an economic incentive for the drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WAT) to encourage them to give priority to people in wheelchairs.

“A \$7.50 lift fee will be introduced to compensate drivers for the time cost associated with loading and unloading wheelchair customers. There are currently 17,000 wheelchair accessible taxi hirings by wheelchair customers per annum.

“This initiative, provided at a cost of \$661,000 over four years, will cut waiting times, as well as improve the viability of the WAT service and its ability to attract and retain drivers.

“It is a measure of our commitment to people with a disability and their families and carers that we have been able to provide – in successive budgets – important new funding to the sector.

“The Government will continue to work closely with the disability sector to implement the Stanhope Government disability reform agenda – *Steps to Reform* - mapped out over the next three to five years,” Mr Wood said.

Statement ends