



## **Discussion with Minister Paul Fletcher MP Minister for Families and Social Services**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Juniper, Balcatta**

### **Opening comments from Minister**

- Has been learning a lot about Social Services over the 6 months he has been Minister. Has been impressed by the extraordinary diversity of work of the sector, and of the passion, commitment and desire to help people
- Believes Australia has had success in maintaining social cohesion, with over 27% of Australians having been born overseas. And noted the important work of the Community Services sector in this area
- NDIS transition process in WA is taking a little longer to join the National system and noted that the learnings from WA helped inform some of the work in setting up NDIS. Noted that specialist disability service accommodation will help 28,000 people and scheme will spend \$700M in this area, which is important
- One of the key priorities for Liberals is getting people from welfare to work, and the “Try/Test/Learn” investment of \$96M is an important aspect of this
- Principles of co-design are very important to the Liberal government.

### **Responses to questions from CEWA members**

- Funding of the Equal Remuneration Order doesn't end until June 2021 and the government has nothing to add at this point, to the issues being faced by service providers when rolling over contracts. Understands the concerns of the sector, but there are more good proposals than funding available
- PIR/PHAMS funding which expires in June 2019 is to rollover into NDIS, however there is no clear timeframe for this. There are over 1000 clients involved and it is a critical issue. At this stage there is no definitive answer on the government's position, but it is not the first time it has been raised. Very conscious of the issue and conscious of the consequences for the clients. Will follow up
- There was \$60M in funding for stock emergency accommodation for women escaping family and domestic violence, and a further \$18M has been approved to help keep women safe in their homes. This funding which had been cut last year, has been renewed following advocacy from Minister McGurk
- Acknowledged it is important to distinguish between consultation and co-design
- Was interested in online platforms and other organisations which are setting up to support people, particularly in the NDIS space – one mentioned which focuses on giving people the opportunity to share their experiences of care, was [www.careopinion.org.au](http://www.careopinion.org.au). A second was [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au) which provides a platform for identifying volunteering opportunities

- Acknowledged the need for 20% of people in regional and rural areas to have electronic access to government services through Community Neighbourhood and Resource centres
- Believes cashless welfare card is broadly accepted in communities and drew on his interactions with people in Leonora and Kalgoorlie which indicated that it is working and that there are many benefits. Conscious of stigmatisation risks and happy to do more to protect the dignity of people. Currently 6,000 people being trialled and looking to increase this to 12,000. Will monitor results and if it continues to show positive outcomes, will look to extend it further
- Following the Banking Royal Commission, there is an Urgent review by DSS of financial counselling and coordination – timing is acknowledged as being short. Louise Sylvan is chairing the review. Not aware of the status of the review on pay day lending legislation. Will follow up
- Quality and safeguarding framework cost of compliance will be substantial. Previously the State has picked these up. It is something that the Commonwealth is looking at actively. Will follow up
- Acknowledged the important work of organisations providing food and meals to people, but not able to indicate if there would be additional funding available to address unmet need
- Work is being undertaken between State and Federal officials to work out the dividing line on a whole range of health issues which NDIS may or may not cover
- With the National Housing and Homelessness agreement, the Commonwealth provides \$1.5Bn and a further \$4.5Bn for Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA). There is a series of outcomes they are asked to report against. No commitment to a national housing and homelessness strategy. Also noted that there has been no indexation on CRA for some years
- Historical COAG agreement that 35% of State housing assets would be managed by the community housing sector. That hasn't happened in WA. Wasn't aware of that fact. Will follow up
- Open minded as to whether Housing should be in DSS or infrastructure portfolios.