

# Victorian Social Welfare Reorganization

On the 23rd November, in the Legislative Assembly of the Victorian Parliament, Mr Brian Dixon, Minister for Social Welfare, introduced a Bill to amend the Social Welfare Act, 1970.

## Three Major Purposes

Mr Dixon said the Bill had three major purposes.

First it would establish a Department of Community Welfare Services in place of the Social Welfare Department. The Minister said that for too long families have lived in unfounded fear of 'the welfare'.

He said the name change was essential if the Department's service capacity for the community was to emerge from the spectre of community apprehension. Mr Dixon said that fears of 'the welfare' had no basis in the Department's services today. He said that the proposals embodied in the Bill would permit the Department a more sensitive, constructive and personal interaction with the Victorian community.

## Community Service Functions

The Bill also spells out community service development functions for the Department. Every person must be able to reach out to services close to his home which meet his real needs, the Minister said. Services within local communities must be co-ordinated and well known.

Mr Dixon said that the Department and the community should strive for a situation where people

can be confident that somebody knows, somebody cares, and that support will be available in a manner which maintains personal dignity.

The Department of Community Welfare Services will explicitly promote preventative and supporting services. The encouragement of voluntary participation and self-help activity will be a vital function of the Department.

## Child Development and Family Services Council

The second major amendment establishes the Child Development and Family Services Council. Mr Dixon said this Council will be unique in Victorian parliamentary history; it would be jointly responsible to the Minister responsible for the administration of the Health Commission with respect to early childhood development and the Minister for Community Welfare Services. Mr Dixon said he could not stress too highly the significance of that co-operative measure. It embodied the earnest wish of many sections of the Victorian community for greater co-ordination and integration of the basic services system.

Mr Dixon said that complete agreement had been reached between the relevant Ministers, namely Mr Jona, as Assistant Minister of Health, and himself, on the for-

mulation of the Council. The Council's membership will comprise representatives of relevant commonwealth, state and local government organisations, nominees from the Victorian Council of Social Service, the Children's Welfare Association, the Australian Pre-School Association, and the Institute of Early Childhood Development. In addition, persons representing welfare "users" in the community will have positions. In all there will be 26 members. They will be supported by a Chairman on a part-time salary basis, a secretariat and research staff.

Council's functions will include advising the Ministers, conducting investigations, acting as a liaison point with the public, and initiating public discussions.

## Correctional Services Council

The third major amendment will establish a Correctional Services Council in place of the Prisons Advisory Council. Mr Dixon said the new Council will have a broader mandate including community based correctional programmes. The Minister said that the Department was committed to further decentralisation of the corrections system and the further development of alternatives to imprisonment, e.g., work attendance centres and work fine options.

The Minister also outlined the community participation process for the 'White Paper' on the Department of Community Welfare Services. He repeated the Victorian

Government's commitment to seeking the opinions of welfare users as a critical component to future policy development.

Mr Dixon said he had asked the Victorian Consultative Committee to consult with all sections of the community, particularly welfare consumers, on the following issues:—

1. What is the responsibility of the Social Welfare Department (to be renamed the Department of Community Welfare Services) with respect to social planning, community development and local services?
2. What should be the basic philosophy of the social welfare system?
3. How should the Social Welfare Department relate to the welfare services of commonwealth, state, local government and community organisations?
4. Who should take responsibility within the social welfare system for the provision of primary, secondary and tertiary welfare services?
5. What measures are proposed to ensure the integration of government and non-government sectors of welfare service delivery?
6. What measures are proposed to co-ordinate services of those involved in the provision of welfare services to ensure the involvement of the numerous welfare agencies, professional organisations, community groups and citizen and consumer bodies?
7. How does the Social Welfare Department ensure maximum feasible involvement of service consumers and promote their capacity for self-help and personal growth?

8. How can the Social Welfare Department ensure that the community is fully informed of the services that are already available and enable them to make the best use of such services?
9. What proposals for change are made to ensure the most efficient and effective use of public money on welfare service programmes.

Mr Dixon said that a departmental 'White Paper' team would assist with considerations which would directly affect the Department's capacity to improve its products, processes and performance at the same time. In particular, it would examine —

10. How can the Social Welfare Department make sure its services are more personal, more approachable, and more related to the needs of the community?
11. What proposals for change in the Social Welfare Department system do you propose to ensure that it adopts an integrative philosophy to fit in with the total welfare scene?
12. How can welfare service systems be simplified and localised to the maximum degree?
13. What recommendations are proposed concerning the objectives specified in the re-organisation of the Social Welfare Department as outlined in the Ministerial Statement of 27th April, 1977?
14. What should be the relationship between the Regional Services Division, other Divisions of the Department and the community in the development of a comprehensive Family Welfare Service?
15. What recommendations arising from the Norgard Inquiry into Child Care in Victoria should be incorporated in Social Welfare Policy?

Mr Dixon said that the Bill would lie on the table of the House over summer recess. He invited comment from all sections of the community and undertook to present a revised Bill to the House in the Autumn Session which would take account of those comments.

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