

STATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING CUTS BITE HARD

CONNECTIONS UNITINGCARE CLOSES SERVICE DUE TO FUNDING

A new report from the Allen Consulting Group, *'How many wheelchairs can you push at once?' Productivity in the community service organisation sector in Victoria*, has confirmed that community sector organisations are turning away eligible clients and cutting back on services due to State Government funding cuts.

The report backed by advice from the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) states that the 2006-2009 Non-Government Organisation Price Index of 2.9% cannot and should not be sustained for the preceding period of 2009-2012 and it should increase to 4.2% or there will be significant pressure placed on these organisations. The report, based on a survey and interviews with over 200 representatives from community sector organisations also found that organisations were already working as efficiently as they can and further productivity improvements are not possible without additional funding.

Connections UnitingCare, one of Victoria's largest welfare agencies and the largest UnitingCare agency in Victoria has already had to close one of its oldest and most valued programs, the Burremah Education Unit due to a lack of funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

Operating since 1974, Connections Burremah Education Unit closed its doors in December 2008, after providing an alternative educational setting for up to 20 weeks for young people of compulsory school age who were disengaged from their mainstream school setting or could not be maintained within the educational system.

'The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) did not provide Connections Burremah Education Unit with any price indexation,' Connections Acting Chief Executive Officer Kimberley Flanagan said. 'There was a totally unrealistic expectation that Connections could continue to absorb the ever increasing budget deficit to run this service.'

'We have a large number of families and individuals that we support through our programs and services. We share concerns with other welfare agencies that with the impact of the broader global economic crisis, we will see an increased number of families needing help and support,' Ms Flanagan said.

'However, if we do not receive an appropriate level of indexation of 4.2% as recommended by VCOSS, we can only assume that further program and service cancellations will become an inevitable reality and clients will be turned away due to a lack of resources.'

Media: Connections Acting Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Flanagan is available for interview. Contact Connections Communications and Fundraising Manager, Matt Clear on 0403 229 094 or matt.clear@connections.org.au