

## ACCOMMODATION REFORMS

# Disability services shake-up

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Medical Editor

The State Government is overhauling disability services, with plans to outsource most accommodation places to non-government groups as it prepares to join the National Disability Insurance Scheme next year.

It says the changes will offer people more choice but unions have warned the plan will be a backward step and create anxiety for residents and their families. The reforms mean 60 per cent of clients housed through the Disability Services Commission will instead be cared for by NGOs.

Disability Services Minister Helen Morton said the move would ultimately mean 500 fewer DSC jobs, but there would be no immediate effect on staff and efforts would be made to re-skill

workers in the longer term.

NGOs already provided 83 per cent of accommodation services for people with disabilities and were best placed to provide most care, she said.

The DSC would maintain places for people who needed temporary, transitional support, or those who had particularly complex needs.

"No one who is now receiving services from the DSC will be disadvantaged or have their services cut," Mrs Morton said.

The DSC is sending letters to residents, families and carers this week to explain the changes.

They will be able to choose whether to stay living with their housemates or move to more individualised accommodation.

Leading disability services

agency Nulsen said it was a positive move for people with disabilities and the sector.

Chief executive Gordon Trewern said it would require Government and non-government services to work together but the DSC had been effectively outsourcing services for 20 years. But the Community and Public Sector Union said slashing the number of DSC accommodation places was short-sighted and meant hundreds of people would miss out on support from the commission's social trainers.

Branch secretary Toni Walkington said there were very few social trainers in private group homes, so many residents would not be helped to develop essential life skills.