Supported Accommodation Assistance Bill 1989

Date Introduced: 4 May 1989
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: Hon. Neal Blewett, M.P., Minister for Community Services and Health

Digest of Bill

Purpose
To introduce a new five-year supported accommodation assistance program (SAAP) that will run until 1994. The Bill also contains a copy of the text which is to form the basis of Commonwealth/State agreements relating to SAAP.

Background
SAAP was introduced because of the duplication and confusion within a range of programs providing crisis accommodation. The program integrated and rationalised funding for youth shelters, women's refuges, crisis accommodation for families, and overnight shelters for homeless men and women. It was introduced in all States and Territories in 1985 and is governed by a Commonwealth/State agreement, which is to continue in force until 30 June 1989. In 1986–87, $75.9 million was provided for the SAAP, $49.1 million by the Commonwealth and $26.8 million by the States and Territories. The April 1987 census of service providers showed that 1139 outlets were funded by SAAP, with an estimated bed capacity of 8382.1

In June 1987 an independent evaluation of the SAAP was conducted to examine the program's effectiveness and to advise on ways of refining its design and focus. On 28 January 1988, the SAAP review report, Homes Away From Home (the Review), was released. The Review concluded that SAAP has become a distinctive welfare program, and since its establishment has overseen significant achievements, both in enabling individuals to find more suitable long-term living arrangements and in developing an effective program which draws on both Commonwealth and States welfare resources. The Review's recommendations included: the continued existence of SAAP after the expiry of the current Commonwealth/State agreement in June 1989, and continued growth in funding to reflect the likely increased demand on the program; that a brief and concise statement of SAAP's objectives and priorities be developed; and that six target groups be identified within SAAP (young people, young adults, women and women with children who are survivors of family violence, families, single women and single men) and that services developed within SAAP should be appropriate to the particular needs of these target groups.2
More specific recommendations included: that young people under 18 years should not be placed in the same accommodation outlet as those over 18; the continued growth of refuges and shelters, especially half-way houses where women and children can live more independently, but still have access to support; the establishment of accommodation services aimed specifically at young women; and that, as a matter of urgency, the Federal and State governments establish responsibility for the provision of long-term housing for people with psychiatric and development disabilities. In respect to funding, the Review recommended that the current program funding arrangements be modified to include two distinct funding elements: ‘base funds’ (i.e. funds needed to meet ongoing costs of existing services) and ‘growth funds’ (i.e. uncommitted funds for new or expanded services, training, redevelopment etc.). In addition, the Review recommended that the ‘base funds’ should be indexed, with an indexation factor based on three quarters of the wages movement for the community services industry plus one quarter of the movement in the CPI, and that ‘growth funds’ should rise in real terms by 8% per annum.3

Main Provisions

Clause 4 provides that the Commonwealth may enter into agreements with States, that are in substantially the same form as set out in the Schedule (see below).

Clause 5 provides that the Minister may authorise payments (including advances) to States, in accordance with agreements, out of appropriated money.

Clause 6 provides that, where the Commonwealth and a State have not entered into an agreement, the Minister may authorise payments to the State, subject to terms and conditions set by the Minister, for the provision of supported accommodation services and related support services in that State. The Minister is not to authorise payments that would be greater than the total that the Minister could have authorised if there was an agreement between the Commonwealth and the State.

Clause 7 provides that the Minister may approve payments out of Commonwealth growth funds for the purpose of research and development of supported accommodation services and related support services. However, the Minister is not to approve payments of more than 2% of Commonwealth growth funds.

The Schedule contains the text of the agreement between the Commonwealth and the States for the provision of supported accommodation services and related support services for a five year period starting on 1 July 1989. The more significant features of the agreement include:

- the agreement will operate, unless varied, from 1 July 1989 until 30 June 1994 (clause 1)
- the objective of the agreement is to provide eligible organisations with financial assistance from the Commonwealth and States for transitional supported accommodation services and related support services to people who are homeless and in crisis to help them move towards independent living, or other alternatives such as long term supported housing, as soon as possible (clause 5)
SAAP is to focus on transitional support, include a range of accommodation and non-accommodation services, including those designed to meet the needs of women and women with children who are homeless and or in crisis as a result of domestic violence, services designed to meet the needs of Aboriginals and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and services for chronically homeless people (sub-clause 6 (1))

SAAP is not to provide specialist clinical or treatment services for people suffering psychiatric other illnesses or from drug abuse; services exclusively for veterans, people leaving prisons, students, handicapped people, children under 16 years, the frail aged or other groups as agreed between the Commonwealth and State Ministers; replace or duplicate services and assistance already provided, or provide services where assistance depends on undergoing rehabilitation (sub-clause 6 (2))

Funding is to be on a needs basis amongst identified priority groups which may include young people, women and women with children who are homeless and or in crisis as a result of domestic violence, families, including single-parent families, single men, and single women (sub-clause 6 (5))

The States will be responsible for the management and administration of SAAP at the State level (clause 9)

The Commonwealth will be responsible for setting national priorities and objectives, monitoring and evaluating SAAP performance at a national level, facilitating information sharing between States, national program financial management, and providing information to States, services and bodies on related Commonwealth assistance programs (clause 10)

A Commonwealth/State plan setting out the operation of SAAP for each year in each State. The plan is to include: an assessment of existing service provision and distribution; an assessment of unmet need; the agreed Commonwealth/State priorities for the year (including identified target groups); finances; the timing, content and process of major program reviews; proposed research and data collections; and the timetable for the planning and approval process (clause 11)

That, in the first year of operation of the agreement the Commonwealth and the States are to provide base funding (i.e. funds needed to meet ongoing costs of existing services) equal to that under the former SAAP scheme as at 30 June 1989 (i.e. $104.4 million) (sub-clause 18 (2))

Commonwealth and States base funding is to be subject to annual indexation based on increases in the average award wage rates for full time adult employees and the CPI (sub-clause 18 (4))
the Commonwealth and States are to provide the growth funds (i.e. uncommitted funds for new or expanded services) specified in sub-clause 19 (1) for the next three years. As well, they are to agree, by 30 June 1991, on the level of growth funds to be provided for 1992–93 and 1993–4 (sub-clause 19 (2)). Commonwealth growth funds provided to a State are to be matched dollar for dollar by the State using funds for new expenditure under SAAP (sub-clause 19 (3)).

References
2. Ibid., pp. 36, and 39–47.
3. Ibid., pp. 53, 60, and 146–151.

For further information, if required, contact the Education and Welfare Group.

6 May 1989

This Digest does not have any official legal status. Other sources should be consulted to determine the subsequent official status of the Bill.

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