

block funding to the States and the establishment of consultative structures with State and local governments, community groups and service users. The Committee recommended a drastic change in the role and focus of the Office of Child Care, including withdrawal from specific project funding and management.

State Government

The responsibilities of the State Government are to allocate a share of State resources to children's services, and to ensure its equitable distribution via an appropriately phased devolution of responsibility to local government, and to regional and sub-regional organisations. In addition, the State Government must establish a sound basis for the oversight and co-ordination of policies for children and families. The Report recommends the establishment of several structures to enable the Government to develop a sound basis for such policy oversight and co-ordination. In order to effectively rationalise the administrative arrangements at the State level, the Report recommends that one Government department should co-ordinate the administration of services.

After extensive examination of a number of alternatives, the Committee opted for the creation of a new department with broad-ranging responsibilities for human services, including the aged, youth, children, and general community services. The Committee believed that the new department would be more capable of moving away from the traditional fragmentation of services into functional categories of health, care, education and welfare, and would be able to implement policies and programmes on principles common to the range of human services.

This department would have both a central and regional administration, and would be responsible for the equitable distribution of funds across the State, via

the allocation of funds to local government.

Local Government

The Committee endorsed as one of its major planning principles, that services should be locally based, planned around the value and relevance of local neighbourhoods. This means that in an overall planning framework the co-ordinating functions and structures at other levels of government should operate to reinforce the planning and co-ordinating capacity at the local level. However, the Committee also recognised that not all local councils are willing or able to assume responsibility for the planning and co-ordination of children's services and recommends that no council should receive funds until it has demonstrated that it can meet certain conditions including: development of a municipal early childhood services policy; ensuring community involvement in the planning process through the establishment of an elected family and children's services committee, and the establishment of an early childhood services team within council's administration, including a planning and development officer and advisory staff. In addition, local government would delegate through legal contracts, responsibility for service provision to community groups and non-government organisations. This delegation would be conditional upon agreement by these groups and agencies that they would operate within State and municipal policies. Once the above conditions are met, local government authorities would receive block grants from the co-ordinating department and allocate funds to the designated services in the municipality. Where a local government authority is not willing or competent to assume responsibility, the State would find other auspices for service delivery, whilst assisting those councils to develop local plans and eventually assume responsibility for planning and co-ordination at a later stage.

SUMMARY COMMENTS

The Report concludes that planning for the provision of children's services cannot be suspended in a time of economic recession, and recommends that immediate priority must be given to the implementation of a social development committee of Cabinet to oversight the policies and programmes of the State Government. The co-ordinating ministry should be established and reviews of both the current system of regulations and standards, and of current industrial issues, must be undertaken as a matter of urgent priority.

In conjunction with the priorities for changes to planning and administrative arrangements, the Report recommends a number of areas of service provision that require immediate attention, including: extension of basic early childhood services to underserved areas of the State, increased funding to those services currently facing financial difficulties, and extension of resources for those groups identified as having special needs. Some, although inadequate attention, is given to the particular needs of the disabled, Aborigines, ethnic communities and children living in isolated areas.

Those members of the Committee not signing the Report did not necessarily disagree on many of the recommendations. They were all agreed, however, that the Report was incomplete, and that its recommendations needed more consideration, elaboration and study. Conversely, those endorsing the Report believe that their analysis of the overall problems of early childhood services is adequate and accurate, and that on this basis, clear recommendations can be made. They also consider that while public policy is developed and defined on the basis of the narrow and limited interests of particular functions, services, or professions, children and their services will be short-changed in Victoria.

A LAST MINUTE REMINDER ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

A PLACE TO GO --- A PLACE TO GROW

You're invited to a National Child Welfare Conference to be held in Brisbane from the 16th – 21st September, 1984.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

Dr. Janet Lahti – Principal Investigator at the Regional Research Institute, Portland State University, Oregon. Dr. Lahti has had a long term interest in Permanency Planning.

FURTHER INFORMATION FROM:

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