



VETERANS' HOME CARE PROGRAM Members' Statements 28 November 2006

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.24 p.m.)—I wish to draw attention to a recent decision regarding the delivery of veterans home care services in the Newcastle and Hunter region. This program provides services that include personal care, domestic assistance, home and garden maintenance, and respite care to eligible veterans, war widows and war widowers. These intensive personal services reduce the need for hospitalisation and institutional care and enable veterans to live in their own homes for longer. In the Newcastle and Hunter region, 2,120 veterans received home care services last year, some 500 of whom live in my electorate of Newcastle.

Veterans' Home Care Program clients are the most vulnerable in our veteran community and many suffer from chronic illness, dementia, post-traumatic stress and other neurological disorders. Given the intensely personal nature of the services provided, veterans often develop a bond with their carers and have the right to expect continuity of care wherever possible.

The Newcastle and District Nursing Service has been a provider of these services since its inception in 2001, providing personalised services to more than 450 veterans in the Hunter region. It is not the sole provider in the Hunter but it has a proven track record, with an extremely high level of client satisfaction: 98 per cent of its clients rate its services as either very good or good.

Regrettably, their contract expires on 16 December and I am advised that the NDNS will no longer be involved in the provision of veterans home care services in the Hunter. That this agency, a local agency with a proven track record, will no longer be involved in the delivery of veterans home care services in my region is part of a deeply worrying trend occurring under the Howard government. I understand that the new provider for the Hunter is a large national agency called Stanhope Health Care Services, whose head office and administrative centre is in Melbourne and who have no proven track record of ever providing veterans home care services in the Hunter.

If recent experiences of the imposition of other centralised models of service delivery in the Hunter are anything to go by, it is hard to imagine how this

new service will be able to maintain, let alone improve on, the quality of existing veterans home care services in our region. That local agencies with a proven track record and strong commitment to local communities are being overlooked in tender processes that appear to give preference to large national agencies is a disturbing trend that has grown rapidly under the Howard government. It is a trend that has grave consequences for local communities, and it must be stopped. It actually takes the local solutions out of service delivery.

With fewer than 18 days to go before the start of the new contracts, I call on the minister to stop riding roughshod over successful local providers and to overturn this seemingly inequitable and potentially calamitous decision. At the very least, the minister should ensure adequate continuity of care for the 450 veterans who will feel the brunt of this decision by allowing them to stay with the NDNS while an inquiry into this tender process is conducted. Just how much weight is given to local service delivery? This is the least the government can do for the 450 veterans facing great uncertainty and the 35 local NDNS employees facing redundancy just before Christmas.