

Tony Windsor MP

Federal Member for New England
PO Box 963 Tamworth NSW 2340

Ph (02) 6761 3080

Fax (02) 6761 3380

Email Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au

Media Release 20th March 2002

Federal Government SACS Award decision could force many Community Groups to close - Windsor

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor today in Parliament asked the Federal Government to reconsider its decision not to match the New South Wales Government's increase in the Social and Community Service Award commonly known as the SACS Award which is impacting heavily on the ability of many groups providing essential community services to continue.

"There are hundreds of organisations at risk at the moment because the Federal Government has not seen fit at this particular time to embrace the increases particularly in the salaries but also in other operating costs that have occurred because of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission finding.

That 6.5% increase has meant that many institutions, non government organisations and non profit organisations in New South Wales are at risk and their duty of care to the people that they are looking after is itself at risk," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor told the Federal Parliament that he had received many representations from groups affected by the Federal Government's decision not to match the State increase.

"Many organisations in my electorate are at risk in relation to the delivery of duty of care and the cost structure they are operating under," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor named some of those groups including the Armidale Youth Care Inc, Tamworth Youth Care Inc, Tamworth Meals on Wheels, and the North West Legal Service.

Mr Windsor described the situation of the Armidale Youth Refuge.

He said, "The Commonwealth argues that wage increases have been indexed over a period of time and are built into the grant funding that is allocated to these particular organisations, but when you look at the Armidale Youth Refuge, for instance, over the last three years and with the projections for the coming year, there has been a four percent increase in the funding package and a 17% increase in costs."

Mr Windsor urged the Minister and the Assistant Treasurer to work through some examples of the impact that this increase in cost is having not only on salaries but also on the overall operating costs of these particular agencies.

"These groups are providing much needed community support programs which we can ill afford to lose as they won't be replaced by direct Government work.

The people who run these programs are committed to providing their particular client group with a high quality service that in turn helps the broader community.

I urge the Government to revisit this particular dilemma," Mr Windsor said.

For further information contact Tony Windsor on 0427 66 8868 or 0412 916 040