

An open letter to the people of South Australia from Kelly Vincent MLC

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Released by stealth last Tuesday, while our country was riveted to the new federal government formation, the South Australian Minister for Disability, Jennifer Rankine, released the most disturbing set of disability service numbers in our history.

Over the last twelve months the Category One Critical list, (that is those people with disabilities who are homeless or at immediate and high risk of harm to self or others), jumped from 510 to 793 people – a 55% jump in need.



In a massive understatement, Minister Rankine proudly stated “overall there is a slight increase so we need to keep working hard.” Now I’m not sure what school Minister Rankine went to, but at Unley High I learned that 55% is not a “slight increase”.

But this is not about numbers, it is about people, real people, good people like the Garton family whose daughter Therese, has Down syndrome and has been on the waiting list for six years... while the Garton family, who were awarded an Order of Australia, grow older in fear and despair.

d4d speaks to people like the Gartons every day.

People like Gail, who is fighting breast cancer at 72 years old while supporting her 39 year old son with an intellectual disability. They have been waiting 16 years on that list for supported accommodation. Gail is terrified about what will happen to her son once she dies.

d4d speaks with people like Judy, who needs a hoist to help get her daughter with multiple severe disabilities in and out of the bathtub. Showers are not an option for this gorgeous little girl who has seizures if she is put in a shower.

We speak with so many families - carers and people with disabilities who need support and who wait, wait, wait, while this government sends out rubbish like the Press Release Ms Rankine spun last week. I could go on and on, but suffice to say, each of the people represented by these numbers has a real story to tell.

Last month we met with Treasurer Foley and I left that meeting in tears. Not because he treated me with such disrespect, but because the picture he painted of the upcoming budget was so bleak, so devoid of compassion or understanding that I despaired for the people I represent.

These Unmet Needs numbers have tipped me over. I, and the people of South Australia, will not and cannot be silent on this government's contempt for the very people who most need its support.

Last year, one exhausted and distressed mother, Beverly Eitzen, allegedly killed her own son with disabilities in desperation. At a Social Inclusion Unit public meeting two weeks ago a brave parent stood up and said that if things didn't change soon, there would be blood on the government's hands. That parent was 100% correct. The Rann/Foley Govt can no longer ignore this crisis.

How many more tragedies will it take before this government looks at its priorities and invests our money where it is most needed?

This government must make a genuine investment in meeting the most urgent needs of people with disabilities now, in this budget, or Rann and Foley will indeed have blood on their hands.

Kelly Vincent MLC
Dignity for Disability
"Dignity Through Choice"
www.d4d.org.au

Rankine's release says: "68 families who are now receiving vital respite to allow them to continue to care for their loved one"

Fact: 469 families are still waiting, with an increase of 80% in Category One crisis need over the past year.

Rankine's release says: "it's pleasing we've been able to reduce the number of people with an unmet need for community support."

Fact: The Category One crisis list for community support has gone up by 53% in the past year. and the unmet need for case management in the Critical category one list has increased by 120% in the last six months alone.

Rankine's release says: "25 people had been provided supported accommodation places"

Fact: 1097 are still waiting, 368 are on the Category One critical list – those who are homeless or at immediate/high risk of harm to self or others.

Rankine's Release says: "increasing demand had contributed to June unmet need data showing an increase of 49 people registered as needing assistance"

Fact : In the last twelve months, 433 extra people with disabilities have registered as needing assistance.

And here are a few other facts that Minister Rankine's sorry excuse for a press release neglected to mention.

- 283 people have been added or moved up into the Category one crisis list in the last year.
- The unmet need for case management in the Critical category one list has increased by 120% in the last six months alone.

- Over the last twelve months, the ONLY element of the Category One list, the Learning and life skills Development, has decreased, and that was by ONE person only, from 26, to 25 people.

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"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." Barack Obama