

Dying for attention

Disabled forced to wait too long for equipment

Xanthe Kleinig
Charity Reporter

WAITING times for disability equipment are so long that people have literally died on the list, a damning report of NSW Health has found.

Hospitals are clogged with people forced to seek medical treatment that the right gear would have avoided. Orthotics, pressure cushions, chairs and bathing aids worth as little as \$55 are on the Program of Appliances for Disabled People list.

Liberal MLC Robyn Parker, chair of a parliamentary inquiry into the program, slammed the "staggering lack of funding" and recommended a budget increase of one third — to \$36.6 million each year — in a report to be released today.

"A lot of people are not on the list because they

have just given up," she said. "We have got children in wheelchairs that don't fit for years and people waiting, sometimes years, for very basic things like shower chairs. The committee heard of clients who have literally died and had still not received their PADP equipment."

Hospital bills of \$100,000 were racked up by patients who developed pressure sores while they waited for medical cushions, she said.

Children with scoliosis were left in "excruciating pain" with damage to their internal organs and structural damage to their skeleton, she said.

And service levels varied greatly depending on which area of the state one lived in.

The MLC suggested the program could breach United Nations conventions for people with disabilities. "You have got to wonder where the

Government's priorities lie when you consider a V8 car race costs \$30 million and we have got people whose basic needs are just not met," she said.

People on the list are required to pay a \$100 co-contribution, a payment believed to bring in less money than it costs to administer.

Michael Alston, a former Paralympian and employee of *The Daily Telegraph* publisher News Limited, waited six months from March this year to be assessed for a new wheelchair.

"The problem is, if you are not an emergency they put you on the list until you are an emergency," Mr Alston said.

Mr Alston last month received a letter approving his addition to the waiting list for funding but it did not indicate when he might expect to reach the top.

News Ltd has decided to pay for the \$5000 chair.

Cop trauma case gets go-ahead

A FORMER policeman who had to attend a horrific death scene at which human flesh fell into his mouth has won the right to sue the state of NSW.

In 1992 when Christopher Cavanagh was required to recover pieces of the body of a worker who had fallen into a garbage shredder at a Sydney railway station, a piece of the body fell into his mouth.

In May this year a NSW Supreme Court judge refused to grant the then 58-year-old an extension of time so his case could go ahead, despite the expiry of the statutory time limit.

But yesterday the NSW Court of Appeal upheld his challenge.

Mr Cavanagh from Northmead will seek damages against the state, claiming he suffered psychiatric injury as a result of its negligence. He said the negligence included a failure to ensure an appropriate police psychologist was available for him after traumatic or life-threatening events.

Cochlear pioneer goes hi-fi

THE Australian scientist who pioneered cochlear implants 30 years ago is now working on a hi-fi version, to be available in as little as five years.

A next-generation implant would not only allow deaf people to hear noise and recognise speech, it would improve clarity, Professor Graeme Clark said.

"The best way to describe it is if someone is hearing speech now with a good cochlear implant ... he would hear speech as though someone had a very hoarse, raspy voice," Professor Clark said.

"You'd still understand what was said but if you hear music through a speech processor ... Beethoven's Fifth, as an example, would sound terrible.

"The other problem is if you're in a noisy surrounding ... a restaurants with bad acoustics, you will not be able to latch on to the finer aspects of speech.

"I would hope that we can make progress within five years to give people good quality [sound]."

Sydney art sent down the toilet

Elizabeth Fortescue
Visual Arts Writer

NOT many people would be overjoyed to be offered an old toilet block to work in — not even if it were a heritage-listed toilet block.

But Sydney's up and coming artists are thrilled Taylor Square's historic underground dunnies are to be an art gallery.

"It's amazing," Redfern artist Robyn Wilson said when she learned that the Darlinghurst toilet block is among six quirky city venues for use by artists, performers, writers and other creatives.

City of Sydney councillors on Monday night decided to implement its cultural development team's idea, with benefits worth the cost of about \$500,000 a year, manager of culture and libraries Kiersten Fishburn said.

Skyrocketing inner-city rents forced artists to outer suburbs and regional areas, diminishing the city's creativity, Ms Fishburn said. "What we have lost is that grunge and gritty stuff."

Other sites include Woolloomooloo's Riley Street Depot which could be artists' studios, Glebe's Walter Burley Griffin Incinerator (writers-rehearsals space) and Paddington Town Hall (art exhibitions and performances).



High aim: Artist Robyn Wilson sees Taylor Square's toilet block as Sydney's newest public art space

Picture: Bob Barker



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