



SENATOR CORY BERNARDI

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families & Community Services
Liberal Senator for South Australia

MEDIA STATEMENT

DISABLED PASSENGERS NEED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Rudd Government needs to investigate financial assistance for carers of disabled Australians who travel by air for medical treatments, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families & Community Services, Senator Cory Bernardi said today.

The Senator's call came after the announcement by regional airline Rex that it is seeking to ban intellectually disabled passengers from flying unaccompanied.

"Disabled Australians living in remote regional and rural areas that need to fly to capital cities for medical treatment should not be expected to fork out for an extra fare so they are able to fly," said Senator Bernardi.

"The Rudd Government needs to ensure that the disabled and their carers are not financially disadvantaged because of their condition, and it must investigate financial assistance to those who need to travel by air to access medical treatments.

"I can only hope that Kevin Rudd chats to his Labor Premier buddies and encourages them to investigate financial assistance, but considering recent attitudes on disability services by Labor, I very much doubt it.

"State Governments have already ignored the disabled by failing to put forward genuine proposals to help overcome unmet need in the areas of supported accommodation and respite as part of the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA) negotiations.

"Despite promises of fast-tracking the CSTDA agreement, the stagnant Rudd Government has simply extended it until June. Drawn out negotiations, threats to cut payments because of inflation and a major back-flip on the carers bonus has shown that the Rudd Government intends to follow its state comrades in simply ignoring the disabled.

"Bill Shorten, the Labor spokesman for disabilities has stated that the airlines should have to fork out the airfare. He is just passing the buck and forcing the airlines to look like the bad guys when it is a governmental responsibility.

"Rex airlines has an obligation for the safety of their staff and other passengers and is adopting a policy similar to the one that Virgin Blue introduced a couple of years ago. The company is doing the right thing by at least offering carers the cheapest fare, but for many this will still make flying out of reach financially.

“These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society who are already extremely disadvantaged due to their disability and isolation.

“Expecting the disabled to meet the cost of an extra airfare when flying for medical treatment or care is just unfair. The State Governments must step in and offer assistance.

“Carers who travel with a person with a disability on a bus or rail journey have their fare subsidised – would it be unreasonable to add airfares?

“This may be reasonable for short journeys but in the case of people based in remote areas of Australia, flying may be the only realistic form of travel.

“This situation further isolates disabled people in the far reaching parts of Australia from receiving proper medical treatment and services.

“The Labor Governments at both a federal and state level need to step up and take disability services seriously and stop treating Australians with a disability as second class citizens.”

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Media Contact: Lauren Kandelaars

Ph: 0410 557 441