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Legal centres urge cut to Public Trustee's \$1500 charge to administer finances of people with disability

UPDATED: THE State Government will consider a review of fees being charged to Tasmanians with a severe disability.

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Disability generic

THE State Government will consider a review of fees being charged to Tasmanians with a severe disability.

People are being charged nearly \$1500 a year to have their money administered by the state unlike other

People are being charged nearly \$1500 a year to have their money administered by the state, unlike other states where they are charged nothing or very little.

Community Legal Centres Tasmania is calling on the State Government to change the Public Trustee's fee structure to cover the cost.

Recipients are deemed unable to administer their own finances, commonly because of severe intellectual disability.

More than 500 people are affected, many in nursing homes or group homes.

The fee is \$1476.45 a year, or 7.4 per cent of their pension, which is \$766 a fortnight.

People are going without food and other essentials, Community Legal Centres Tasmania said.

"We're very concerned that the Public Trustee is charging almost \$1500 for a service that the overwhelming majority of Australian jurisdictions provide either free of charge or for a nominal fee," spokesman Benedict Bartl said.

When a person lacks the capacity to manage their financial affairs, the Guardianship and Administration Board will often appoint a financial administrator to assist, for example, to pay rent, power and, if there are leftovers, pocket money.

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In one case, a woman did not have enough to buy a chocolate bar.

The Guardianship and Administration Board has also raised the issue in cases in which they represented clients.

The Community Legal Centres report said that in late 2013 the Public Trustee advised Advocacy Tasmania that \$227,000 a year would allow fee waiving for people reliant on Centrelink and with assets under \$10,000.

"The significant hardship caused by the Public Trustee's fee structure has been a recurring theme for many of our clients for over a decade," Advocacy Tasmania chief executive officer Ken Hardaker said.

"As the owner of the Public Trustee, the government can reduce the hardship ... by directing that the Public Trustee provide a free service to persons subject to financial administrative orders."

Many people have congenital or acquired disability, and some have dementia or chronic mental illness.

The State Government said the issue had been around for many years and had been inherited from the former government.

“The government will consider the proposal for a review of fees in consultation with the Public Trustee in the lead up to the next State Budget, bearing in mind the \$1.1 billion budget mess that we need to clean up,” a spokesperson said.

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