Hospice plans turned into ‘political football’

Matt Garrick

The fate of a designated $5 million palliative care hospice promised for Alice Springs is up in the air, and has become a blame game of “political football” as to why plans have changed.

Advocates of the proposed hospice have voiced their disappointment the NT Government will now construct a multipurpose health facility opposed to the previously promised hospice.

But current Health Minister John Elferink has denied the blame should fall in his court, and instead pointed the finger at his predecessor, Robyn Lambley.

Despite Mrs Lambley being an ardent supporter for a hospice, the MLA for Arakan has been dubbed as “duplicitous” by Mr Elferink for signing off on a document in 2014, which labelled the project a “multipurpose centre” rather than solely for palliative care.

“She’s been quite duplicitous in telling people in Alice Springs right now that ... this decision is a recent one,” Mr Elferink told ABC Radio last week.

Mrs Lambley defended her position, saying she had worked “very hard” to reel in the $5 million in Federal Government funding in for Alice Springs.

“They’ve found one document where it was referred to as a multipurpose centre ... I can show you 12 where it was called a palliative care facility,” Mrs Lambley said.

Palliative Care NT president Sandra Clyne said she was disappointed her group’s hard-fought goal had become “a bit of a political football”.

“That’s not what we really want but he (Elferink) made it into that,” Ms Clyne said.

“Robyn has always supported the idea of a stand-alone hospice for Alice Springs, just as Darwin’s got.”

“Basically, we want the same type of facility and staffing for here, as Darwin has.”

Ms Clyne said time was running out for plans to be altered away from a multipurpose facility, with design tenders slated to be put out soon. She said she hoped to engage Mr Elferink and Chief Minister Adam Giles to discuss changing the plans before it was too late.

Get after these grants

Applications for round one of the 2016-17 multicultural grants program are open.

Multicultural Affairs Minister Peter Styles said the program provided support for multicultural communities to develop projects that encourage social inclusion and cohesion.

“The Territory’s long history of cultural and linguistic diversity has enriched our society economically, socially and culturally,” Mr Styles said.

Guidelines at multicultural.nt.gov.au or via email multiculturalaffairs.dcm@nt.gov.au. Applications close March 31.

Mahar steps up at NFF

The National Farmers’ Federation has a new chief executive officer.

Former deputy CEO Tony Mahar officially replaced Simon Talbot on Monday.

Mr Talbot has been CEO for the past 18 months.

NFF president Brent Finlay said: “Tony has been one of the key drivers in setting a new clear and progressive strategic direction for the organisation and how it will best represent the Australian agriculture industry.”

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