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Disabled Territorians left at the Taxi Rank

Disabled Territorians are suffering from a shortage of dedicated taxis designed for disabled people because the Labor government has failed to provide funding for enough taxi operators to pick them up.

Opposition Spokesman for Health Dr. Richard Lim said that quite rightly, operators of dedicated taxis for the disabled are not willing to drive these taxis because they can't or don’t make enough money to survive.

"The Minister for Transport has denied any responsibility and has hand-passed it to the Minister for Health. It is time the NT Government accepts responsibility to provide mobility for disabled people," Dr Lim said.

Further, the Territory is the only State or Territory in Australia that does not have in place a funding program to ensure that there are enough disabled taxis in operation to serve the community.

“Disabled Territorians are suffering because the Labor government is not willing to put its hand in its pockets to ensure there are enough dedicated taxis that pick up disabled people. That is a disgrace,” Dr. Lim said.

“These people deserve the respect that able-bodied people receive when it comes to getting around. Reports in the media last week suggest that disabled people cannot get disabled taxis for everyday travel because operators cannot make enough money. The government must step in and provide a scheme whereby drivers will not lose out by driving these taxis.

“Disabled people rely heavily on taxis to get around. By not having enough disabled taxis, the government is restricting their full participation in the community and hindering their efforts to live their life to the full."
Currently, people with disabilities can apply for taxi vouchers, up to $500 per year for an ambulant person with disabilities, and $1700 for a person in a wheelchair. That translates to less than $10 per week for ambulant persons and $32 per week for a person in a wheelchair.

"The taxi voucher system provided by the Health Department equates to less than $5 subsidy each way of a cab ride from home and if you are in a wheelchair, it is just on $16 subsidy each way,” Dr Lim said.

“The Labor government has to step in and provide adequate funding incentives for operators to guarantee that there are enough cabs for disabled Territorians. All Territorians don’t want disabled people to be left waiting at the taxi, especially during late evenings, when getting an MPT is 'pot-luck'."