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Agencies slam SWD on elders' issue

A GROUP of voluntary agencies lashed back at the Social Welfare Department's argument that its cuts on money to centres for the elderly had no negative effect on them.

From April this year, all government subvented elderly centres were designated Category II service, and the centres' financial resources were reduced by 20 to 30 per cent.

In a statement yesterday, the Action Group on Social Centre and Multi-service Centre for the Elderly, representing 20 agencies, said under their expansion plan for 1982-83, only four out of 15 social centres and none of the three multi-service centres had been opened.

The group said while previous commitments would be honoured, they would not undertake any further projects unless the new subvention policy on elderly centres was changed.

On the SWD's recent statement that a number of the group's agencies had not planned to withdraw new projects for the elderly service after the new subvention was implemented, the group

explained that those projects were commitments made before the new policy.

It also criticised the SWD's statement that funds allocated to individual centres this year had increased by 20 per cent over last year's as "very misleading".

The social centres for the elderly were requested by the SWD to add an additional post of social work assistant in October 1981, it said.

"This explains why in the 1982-83 subvention, there is an actual increase of financial support from the government," the group said, "but if one disregards the additional post, there is no increase at all."

Apart from that, the group attacked the SWD's saying that the elderly centres were placed in Category II service because these were services it would like the community to support.

"There are many services that can easily attract donations if placed within Category I, and there is no reason to single out social centres and multi-service centres for the elderly," it said.

Government has confused the target group of elderly social centres with that of the home-help service and day-care service in considering social centres as a Category II service.

The group also considered the SWD was premature in making a statement when it had received only two appeals from the agencies for further financial assistance so far.

"The SWD ignores the problems of voluntary agencies which run all the direct services for the elderly," the statement said.