

28 April 2017

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities.

I am responding on behalf of the NSW Disability Network Forum (DNF), a group of non-government, non-provider peak representative, advocacy and information groups whose primary aim is to promote the interests of people with disability. A list of DNF members is included at the end of this letter. The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) also provides secretariat support to the DNF.

The DNF would like to make brief comments on the role played by disability representative and advocacy organisations in improving the design of transport services and infrastructure in NSW to create a more accessible transport system for people with disability. If this role is to continue, continued funding of these organisations is crucial.

Background to comments

Advocacy, information and representation organisations in NSW face substantial uncertainty of funding. As the Committee may be aware, all of NSW funding for disability services, including the approximately \$25 million per year which funds disability advocacy and information organisations, will be transferred to the Commonwealth after 30 June 2018 to fund the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). As yet, no alternative source of funding has been identified.

The *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (NSW) emphasises that disability inclusion is a whole-of-Government responsibility. Each NSW Government agency is required to develop a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) outlining the actions they will take against four key priorities in the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan. One of these priorities is to create more liveable communities for people with disability.

While the DNF acknowledges that the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) funds some advocacy in NSW, this national funding also faces an uncertain future. Outcomes of a review are due in August 2017, but there is no certainty about when a new system will be in place. More pertinently, it is unlikely that the NDAP will fund activities that fulfil responsibilities of the NSW Government.

The contribution of the advocacy sector to the development of transport services and infrastructure is highlighted below. Failure to fund these contributions will impede the delivery of the NSW Government's inclusion agenda which reflects its obligations under the National Disability Strategy.

Lobbying to create accessible communities

DNF members advocate to create more accessible communities, including by making improvements to transport services and infrastructure. For example,

- People With Disability Australia and Blind Citizens Australia have worked with Transport for NSW and the City of Sydney on developing accessible wayfinding signage, including design and piloting of the Tactile Braille Street Signage attached to Smart Poles throughout the Sydney CBD. This collaboration has greatly improved access for people with disability and is considered best practice on street signage.
- The Physical Disability Council of NSW has lobbied to improve the physical accessibility of the NSW rail network, for example by joining access committees and lobbying local politicians. In 2015-16, 12 additional NSW stations were made fully or partially accessible¹. Of note, Artarmon station was made accessible in an upgrade that was the culmination of a 15 year campaign led by a former PDCN staff member and local resident.²

Removing barriers to accessible communities through consultation

DNF members engage in numerous consultation activities with the NSW Government which identify and work to remove barriers to accessible environments. Members commend the approach of Transport for NSW, which brings together representatives of a range of disability organisations in the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee (ATAC).

This group meets quarterly and assists Transport for NSW to contribute to inclusive and accessible communities. The functions of ATAC include:

- identifying current, emerging and potential accessibility issues or barriers for people with a disability in the transport system and providing advice to the Department on these matters; and
- commenting on any customer service, infrastructure development and policy matters relating to improving public transport accessibility for people with a disability or with mobility issues referred by Transport for NSW.³

¹ [Physical Disability Council of NSW Annual Report 2015-6](#), p. 21.

² [Artarmon Train Station Upgrade Disabled Station Access Finally Delivered](#), North Shore Times, 15 January 2016.

³ ATAC Terms of Reference.

An example of ATAC providing feedback on an emerging issue occurred with the roll out of the Opal Card system which replaced paper tickets in NSW in late 2016. During the phased roll-out of the Opal Card, the NSW Council on Intellectual Disability reported to ATAC that its members were often fined for not ‘tapping on and off’ buses correctly, and found it difficult to apply for an Opal Card online or over the phone. In response to this feedback:

- Opal Cards were made available at Service NSW outlets and;
- transit officers are provided with disability awareness training which encouraged them to adopt a lenient attitude to customers with recognised disability.

As part of making the transport system more responsive to people with disability, ATAC provides feedback on the DIAP of Transport for NSW. The DNF notes that the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)* requires that Government agencies consult with people with disability in the development and review of DIAPs. To date, consultation has involved organisations that have no certainty that they will be in existence in the lead up to the review of DIAPs required by 1 December 2019.

Members of ATAC and other consultative fora will not be able to respond to State Government processes and initiatives unless they are provided with recurrent funding to do so. Any potential increase in funding for the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) will be insufficient to cover the shortfall left by the withdrawal of State funds for advocacy in NSW. As mentioned, it is highly unlikely that NDAP funding will support core responsibilities of the State Government.

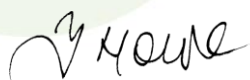
Accordingly, the DNF emphasises the importance of all levels of Government acting in concert to fund the contribution of disability representative and advocacy organisations as part of creating inclusive and accessible communities under the National Disability Strategy. We recommend the Commonwealth advocate for joint action on this issue within the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Recommendation 1

That the Commonwealth use COAG processes to encourage State and Territory Disability Ministers to fund disability representative and advocacy organisations. In doing so, the role these organisations play in assisting Governments to create inclusive and accessible communities under the National Disability Strategy should be emphasised.

If you have any questions about the points raised above, please email Ya’el Frisch (NCOSS Policy Officer, Disability) at yael@ncoss.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Tracy Howe
Chief Executive Officer, NCOSS
on behalf of the Disability Network Forum

NSW Disability Network Forum Member Organisations:

- Being Mental Health and Wellbeing Consumer Advisory Group
- Blind Citizens NSW
- Deaf Australia NSW
- DeafBlind Association NSW
- Deafness Council (NSW)
- First Peoples Disability Network
- Information on Disability and Education Awareness Services (IDEAS) NSW
- Institute for Family Advocacy
- Intellectual Disability Rights Service
- Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW
- NSW Council for Intellectual Disability
- NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
- NSW Disability Advocacy Network
- People with Disability Australia
- Physical Disability Council of NSW
- Positive Life NSW
- Side by Side Advocacy Incorporated
- Self Advocacy Sydney
- Synapse (Brain Injury Association NSW)

