

advocacy for  
**inclusion**

Submission to  
ACT Budget Consultation 2010-11

Advocacy for Inclusion  
September 2009

## **About Advocacy for Inclusion**

Advocacy for Inclusion acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners of the land on which we work.

Advocacy for Inclusion provides individual, self and systemic advocacy services for people with disabilities. We provide information, education, and representation to effectively advocate for positive and inclusive outcomes for people with disabilities.

We act with and on behalf of individuals in a supportive manner, or assist individuals to act on their own behalf, free of conflicts of interest and motivated only by a desire to obtain a fair and just outcome for the individual concerned.

Advocacy for Inclusion works within a human rights framework and acknowledges the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, and the *ACT Human Rights Act*.

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September 2009

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## Introduction

People with disabilities comprise approximately 17 per cent of the ACT population. Despite the ACT population having a higher level of income, higher general health and wellbeing, and higher education outcomes, the picture for people with disabilities lags behind.

The recent report *SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia*<sup>1</sup> provides a stark picture of the continuing exclusion experienced by people with disabilities. This exclusion takes many forms, but is largely contributed to by the substantial difficulties many people with disabilities experience in accessing quality appropriate, mainstream and specialist services.

The September 2009 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Report – *Disability in Australia: multiple disabilities and need for assistance*<sup>2</sup> clearly highlights the chronic lack of support for people with disabilities across the entire disability population. The report provides evidence that even those people with disabilities who are able to access support still are not accessing it at the level needed. The half of the disability population with more than one disability are much less likely to gain the level of support they need, yet even amongst those with a single disability a large portion of the population is still not being supported at a level which allows them to live with dignity and independence.

Inclusion of people with disabilities in our community is still far from reality. Many people with disabilities live their entire life housed, supported, and attending social events fully separate from the broader community. Our community needs to move forward from considering people with disabilities as occasional participants in the community, and recognise that the rhetoric about an inclusive community must be supported by substantial action.

The lack of support for people with disabilities results in a large proportion of the disability population living without employment or education opportunities. This has a direct impact on their ability to earn income and live independently as taxpayers. Apart from the human rights implications this has a direct impact on the cost to the broader community.

An inclusive community will encompass services across the broad spectrum of life to include all services, accommodation, roads (adequate parking), schools, transport (including school transport), recreation etc. It will allow people with disabilities to engage in employment, education, and social events. By focussing on an inclusive community the reliance on a parallel world of specialist service providers will reduce. If people have friends and colleagues they are more likely to have natural supports within their community rather than being isolated and only ever having contact with paid support workers.

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<sup>1</sup> *SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia*- National Disability Strategy Consultation Report prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council 2009 ISBN 978-1-921380-54-9

<sup>2</sup> *Disability in Australia: multiple disabilities and need for assistance* – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, September 2009 ISBN 978 1 74024 947 8

## **Summary of recommendations**

1. That all agencies across government collect data on service use by people with disabilities.
2. Allocate specific ongoing funding for community based disability awareness training which is delivered by people with disabilities.
3. That the acquisition program for accessible ACTION buses is substantially accelerated.
4. That wheelchair accessible taxis are provided through a non-profit service which has salaried drivers.
5. That the Government supports inclusive housing options for people with disabilities through social housing providers.
6. That the ACT Government gives urgent attention to improving pay rates for workers in the disability sector.
7. That specific funding is allocated to pilot a parenting support service in the ACT based on the Barkuma Community Support Service model.

## **Access Action Plans**

Reducing the reliance on a parallel world of specialist service providers will also reduce the enormous cost in creating that parallel world. All mainstream services across government must have disability access action plans which clearly illustrate how people with disabilities are able to access their services to the same extent as other members of the community. All services across government must collect data on the level of access to their services by people with disabilities to illustrate improvements in line with benchmarks in their access action plans.

**Recommendation 1: that all agencies across government collect data on service use by people with disabilities.**

## **Raising community awareness**

Increasing the use of mainstream services by people with disabilities cannot happen in isolation. The broader population, workers in mainstream services, and families need assistance in understanding the value of people with disabilities in their day to day life. Objective 1.1 of *Future Directions: A framework for the ACT 2004-2008* outlined the importance of community based disability awareness training in achieving “positive community attitudes *which* recognise the rights of people with disabilities to full participation, self determination and their capacity to contribute to the community”.<sup>3</sup>

*Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014* also clearly calls for disability awareness training under Strategic Priority 3.<sup>4</sup> Disability awareness and inclusion training conducted by people with disabilities is difficult to access in the ACT. It could be argued that Strategic Objective 1.1 from Future Directions 2004-2008 has been largely unmet, and therefore returns in the recently released version Towards Challenge 2014. Ongoing funding must be allocated to achieve this goal.

The cost to the community of increasing engagement, without increasing awareness and understanding of people with disabilities by the broader community, is an increased cost in providing services to overcome discrimination and exclusion. The current experience for advocacy organisations indicates that the latter circumstance has become the more common occurrence, which means our community is currently spending a large amount each year in supporting people with disabilities to overcome inappropriate behaviours by others when a comparatively smaller allocation of preventative funding for awareness and inclusion training would alleviate the situation.

Abuse and violence against people with disabilities and particularly against women with cognitive disabilities, often goes undetected, unreported, uninvestigated, un-prosecuted and unpunished. The successful detection, investigation and prosecution of abuse and violence of people with cognitive disabilities requires a particular value-base, expertise, and practice that has not been present in mainstream law enforcement agencies. Substantial training and support for law enforcement officers is needed urgently to redress the current situation and to provide ongoing long term consultant expertise.

**Recommendation 2: Allocate specific ongoing funding for community based disability awareness and inclusion training which is delivered by people with disabilities.**

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<sup>3</sup> *Future Directions: A framework for the ACT 2004-2008* DHCS ACT 2004, Strategic Direction 1

<sup>4</sup> *Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014*, DHCS ACT 2009, Strategic Priority 3

## **Transport**

A major barrier to inclusion for people with disabilities in the ACT is the lack of reliable transport. Many people with disabilities are forced to rely on a taxi system which is, at best, dysfunctional. The ACT Government spends enormous resources providing band aid solutions to the taxi system including increased lift fees for public holidays, micro management funding to taxi companies, enhanced taxi subsidy scheme support for consumers, and specific public holiday incentive payments for drivers.

The wheelchair accessible taxi service in Canberra fails to provide a reliable form of transport. A significant difficulty with the system is that it is undertaken by operators through a for profit model. Large incentives provided by government have affected little or no actual benefit on the ground for those relying on the system. People are unable to commit to employment or education opportunities as they cannot actually reach their destination with any consistency.

Removing the wheelchair accessible taxi service to a non-profit model, which employs salaried drivers, will ensure that all such taxis are used for the purpose they were intended. It will also reduce the need for the significant package of incentives currently provided by government, and reduce the substantial cost to consumers of missed appointments and lost employment.

Additionally, specific disability transport is provided because the ACTION bus network remains largely inaccessible to many people with disabilities. A fully accessible bus network will overcome the reliance on taxis and specialised separate transport.

**Recommendation 3: that the acquisition program for accessible ACTION buses is substantially accelerated.**

**Recommendation 4: that wheelchair accessible taxis are provided through a non-profit service which has salaried drivers.**

## **Accommodation**

The shortage of accommodation options for people with disabilities, coupled with the enormous fatigue of those supporting people with disabilities, has resulted in a reliance on generic solutions. This has become particularly evident in accommodation services where a reliance on small institutions has become the norm, with proposals for separate communities also being developed. One size is presumed to fit all, when the policy rhetoric talks about “person centred” and “independent decision making”.

As mentioned above, it is these separate services which often create isolation and abuse for people with disabilities. Our government must continue to support the move away from these forms of accommodation and persist with broader inclusion in the housing options available to the rest of the community, which are based on the needs and desires of the individual.

A more accessible and inclusive option would be to increase the capacity of social housing providers to support people with disabilities. Raising awareness about the tenancy needs of people with disabilities, and supporting housing providers and managers to work with tenants with disabilities will reduce the need for separate specialised housing.

People with disabilities do not only want to live with other people with disabilities. They are just as likely to want to live with family, friends without disabilities, or alone. Supporting existing social housing providers to become more inclusive will reduce costs and improve housing options.

**Recommendation 5: that the Government supports inclusive housing options for people with disabilities through social housing providers.**

### **Sustainable workforce**

The ACT Government must pay urgent attention to pay rates for community sector workers. Many people with disabilities rely on workers in this sector and pay rates are contributing directly to the quality of the workforce and its highly casualised nature. Without a substantial overhaul of pay rates, similar to the lead taken by the Queensland Government, it will be impossible to change the profile of the disability sector workforce. This workforce is largely female and casual in its nature.

Advocacy organisations regularly see breaches of privacy, physical and sexual violence, forced removal between group homes, no community engagement, and denial of decision making. Most of these incidents occur because staff are casual, inexperienced, or severely over worked.

Benchmarks to move towards a more sustainable workforce should be a part of all government strategic frameworks. As many people with disabilities rely on workers in such circumstances this directly affects the quality of service provision to people with disabilities.

### **Recommendation 6: that the ACT Government give urgent attention to improving pay rates for workers in the disability sector.**

#### **Support for parents with disabilities**

The ACT Government should implement comprehensive and intensive parenting and family support services for parents with disabilities to assist in maintaining children with their parents and within their own family homes. Children of parents with disabilities are removed from their parents into other caring arrangements at an alarming rate. This removal is often long term or permanent and is based on the parent having a disability.

Services to provide support must be developed as a matter of urgency with success measures tracked to ensure the removal rate of children is reduced. Support services are needed to assist with pregnancy and birthing, custody, adaptive baby care equipment, as well as general parenting issues.

The Barkuma Community Support Service in South Australia runs a parenting support service for parents with intellectual disabilities which could become a model for a similar service in the ACT. It costs substantially less to run this type of service than it does to provide long term Care and Protection involvement and fostering for the children of parents with disabilities.

### **Recommendation 7: that specific funding is allocated to pilot a parenting support service in the ACT based on the Barkuma Community Support Service model.**

#### **Conclusion**

Building a parallel world for people with disabilities absorbs enormous resources, yet still does not provide an adequate or appropriate level of support for people with disabilities.

Ensuring that mainstream services are able to cater to the needs of people with disabilities will ultimately cost the community less in disability services. Providing community based awareness training for staff in mainstream services will reduce discrimination and exclusion cases, which will also reduce costs at the crisis end of service provision. This will free up funds and make them available to overcome current levels of unmet need.

The whole community will benefit by providing greater inclusion of people with disabilities.