Day 1, Wednesday 14th September

1:30-2:45pm: Digital Government – The Way Forward

(LUNCH BREAK)

JULIE McCROSSIN: Ladies and gentlemen, it's just one minute till half-past, then I'll kick off. But you'll notice up on the screen is my dog. This is Bruno. He's a cavoodle, and he is the epicentre of my emotional wellbeing. Now, why do I have him up there? Because I was promised that, in the Smart Cities presentation, there would be a reference to how it would benefit not only us as citizens, but also dogs. Is there anyone with information about how dogs – yes? Teresa, come out. Thank you. How could dogs be benefited by Smart Cities?

TERESA CORBIN: I Googled recently weird things on Internet of Things. I came up with tracking your dog – you can put a tracker in that tells you how many steps the dog is doing during the day when you're not home. The dog can also have a censor so that, when he or she comes near the dog door, the dog door will open only for him or her. And there's all sorts of amazing Internet of Things things that you would never even think of that have to do with dogs.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Ladies and gentlemen, you're probably not going to believe this, but we didn't work this out in advance. That was a spontaneous response. Would you please give her a round of applause?

(APPLAUSE)

That little innocent creature is soon going to be under a degree of supervision that he's never imagined. Well, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our after-lunch session, and welcome to those who've just joined us. I'm just going to begin by pulling the lucky-door prize. We have another magnificent wi-fi set of earplugs worth an inordinate amount of money. I think it's $236. I'm wiggling through the numbers. Remember, it's redraw if the person isn't here. It's purple, 31. Someone's got excited inappropriately...

Purple C31.

I don't like to say this, although it is Sydney – he's going through his handbag. Has he got it?

I don't want to challenge you – you have! Fantastic.

(APPLAUSE)

Congratulations. Here's your prize. Thank you. We have one more of those to do after the afternoon tea. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this session – Digital Government – The Way Forward. You'll see in your program we have five speakers who are each going to begin by telling us some of the challenges faced by the people that they represent and work with in their organisation and some of their initial thoughts on what can be done to improve access to government services. We also have a representative of the Department of Finance in the Australian Government, John Sheridan, who's going to talk to us about the Australian Standard for ICT accessibility, which is being developed. Our first speaker is Joseph Caputo, the chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia. Please make him welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

JOSEPH CAPUTO: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, friends. First of all, I would like to thank the ACCAN team for inviting me as a representative of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia to be here today. Before I continue, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in which we meet and pay my respect to their elders past and present, and I do so in the spirit that – apart from Australia's first people, the rest of us, we all came here either by boat or by plane at some stage in our lives, or forebears.

All levels of government are currently moving to digital government service delivery to make it easier for individuals and businesses to access government services. FECCA has consulted with culturally and linguistically diverse service providers across the country to gather views and experiences of using digital government services. Different cohorts of migrants have different experiences when accessing digital services. Some groups may have great difficulties due to limited digital literacy and English language skills. For example, refugees and older migrants. For those who migrate to Australia with little or no experience using computer and internet, developing digital literacy is a crucial part of the settlement process, and this will take time. Other groups will adapt more quickly to using digital services. For example, skilled migrants, young migrants, and those with good English-language skills. Some people migrate to Australia with significant experience using computers, smart devices and the internet. The recently released Australian Digital Inclusion Index found that Australians who speak a first language other than English have a relatively high level of digital inclusion, which has been steadily increasing since 2014. Given the diversity of this group, care must be taken when considering these findings and the unique circumstances of different groups of Australians' culturally and linguistically diverse community should be considered. As governments move to digital service delivery, digital access is an important consideration. Currently, about 86% of Australian households have access to the internet. This access is more common in major cities and for households with children under 15. Cost is a significant barrier for many households who do not currently have internet access, particularly for refugee groups and families with young children. Migrants and refugees regularly raise privacy concerns with regards to accessing government services online with us. Many have lived in countries where government agencies are not trustworthy and are wary of anything that puts all of their personal information in one place – information about privacy and security of digital services, including who has access to an individual's data, and how this data is to be used, is currently well-communicated to the public. Many people use digital services on behalf of others – for example, relatives or clients. The most common reason reported to us for using online services on behalf of someone else was that the service recipient did not know how to use digital services. It is important that the data is collected about the use of digital platforms in order to design and deliver a person-centric service. This will allow agencies to understand whether digital delivery targets the actual service recipient or their nominees. As government moves service delivery online, tailored response must be designed to address accessibility issues with a view of overcoming barriers to access and achieving equity of outcomes. FECCA recommends that government agencies recognise the diversity of users and gaps in capacity in access, including the development of data collection plans across government. The accessibility of online government service delivery must be improved, including through the use of simple and consistent icons, icons across platforms, clearly identified information online in community languages, with availability of translated materials using a single and prominently positioned symbol across all government agencies, and indirect technologies to improve non-English speakers. Government must continue to provide multiple ways for communities to interact with government service delivery, including face-to-face interaction at shopfronts, and using prop-up assistant information shops, particularly in rural and regional areas. Targeted communication strategies should be implemented to reach ethnic communities to improve awareness of online services and reduce concern about privacy and security. Easy-to-understand information in plain English and community language can be used to communicate messages to existing and prospective users of digital services. To conclude, governments should look at what they can do to build community capacity and equitable participation in the use of digital services – for example, funding assistance for multicultural and settlement service providers to deliver training to migrants and refugees. For example, the Victorian Government has funded Victorian Tech Savvy Seniors, which is designed to give older people – particularly those living in rural and regional Victoria – the opportunity to develop skills to use technology. Libraries across the state of Victoria have offered training as part of this program, including libraries that have delivered training in language other than English. So, thank you very much for listening to me. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you very much, Joseph. If you'd like to take a seat, we'll have opportunities for questions later. It's my pleasure now to ask David Brady, the chair of Deafness Forum of Australia, to come and speak to us to give his thoughts on improving access to government services. Please make him welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

DAVID BRADY: Thank you. First, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay respects to eldest past, present and future. I'd also like to thank the organisers for providing Auslan interpreters and captioners, and the loop, to ensure that we have full communication accessibility for everybody present. I would also like to acknowledge the language of Auslan, the language of the Australian Deaf community, with the interpreter here today being my voice to members of the Australian Deaf community here. I'm the chair of Deafness Forum Australia, coming up to my sixth year – exciting times ahead. I do have a full-time paid job as CEO of Hear For You, an organisation providing mentoring programs for Deaf and hard-of-hearing teenagers by Deaf and hard-of-hearing adults. Let me begin by disclosing that I was born deaf with hearing loss of 90 decibels in both ears. I'm support by two high-powered hearing aids to help me hear and speak, along with lip-reading. If I take my hearing aids off, this room will be completely silent to me. The only sound I can hear, if the ACCAN organiser can do it, is to bring a jumbo jet and put it on full blast.

One area of our lives is constant – the need to engage government service shopfronts in our lifetime to obtain drivers' licences, birth and marriage certificates, Medicare claims of inquiries, unemployment support inquiries, and so on. This will be done in offices of Medicare, Centrelink, motor registries, the Australian Tax Office, and the NDIS. As one in six Australians have hearing loss or deafness, these shopfronts are places we fear to tread. They are busy. Noisy. And sometimes confusing environments. And for communication accessibility perspective, it's often unfriendly. A recent personal experience – I changed my car registration from the ACT to NSW. It was a highly frustrating and difficult few hours for myself and the staff involved. There was a need to keep repeating information, causing frustration for both myself and the staff at the counter. I'm not Robinson Crusoe. As the chair of Deafness Forum of Australia, I hear similar stories wherever I go. Some from young people who attend my youth sessions, who maintain getting their driver's licence is not something they would like to repeat. They've been caused deep embarrassment, and the fear of missing out on critical information when they're going for their test. For Auslan users, it's even more difficult. Interpreters have to be booked in advance to accompany a person, weeks in advance, in the hope that the staff member is free with the service available. People like me – it's a scenario, asking for hearing loops to be available, and sometimes paying for remote captions out of our own pockets. If all else fails, desperately winging it. A little over four years ago, Deafness Forum checked the date. It was 2012. We thought, "Surely, Australia has the technology available to make things easier." We met with the then-Commonwealth minister of human services to make a start at a federal level, with a trial of remote Auslan interpreting services on demand at Centrelink and Medicare shopfronts in Queensland. There were reservations, but we persisted, and the trial produced extremely positive feedback from Deaf customers, interpreters and the staff at each trial site. All reported much better communication conditions and greater flexibility.

I am pleased to acknowledge that this video Auslan relay service has been rolling out across all Centrelink and Medicare centres, which I understand will incorporate the National Disability Insurance Scheme centres. The NSW Government was very open to our suggestion, and Service NSW centres in Sydney recently completed a trial of live captioning, audio loop, and video relay interpreters. VicRoads are watching. They're watching this trial, and we are quite hopeful that these shopfronts and other state and territory governments will soon follow. Our vision is for these services to be a standard feature in all government and business shopfronts, hospital reception desks, health clinics, banks, post offices, and many other places, making a more inclusive for all Australians wherever they live. This is an especially great benefit, particularly if you live in rural and regional Australia, where communication service providers might be in very short supply. Captions on demand, in particular, improve access for those for whom spoken English is their second language. And for people who better process the written word before it's actually spoken. So, let me summarise this simple case study.

Identify your target. If you can, start the advocacy at the top level with an organisation that has a broad reach, and will be a sampler for other organisations. Explain how the new, inclusive services will help them meet their customer service obligations. Build their reputation as an innovator. Save time. And make their jobs easier.

Explain to political leaders and their advisors that new services will be popular with their electorate. And, be a lasting legacy from their time in office, no matter how long or short.

(LAUGHTER)

Most of all, be patient and persistent. It's taken Deafness Forum of Australia four years to get to this point. And don't expect to be recognised for your advocacy work. The relevant minister and departments will probably claim the glory. But, Australians – we – get the rewards. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you. Thank you so much. It's my pleasure now to introduce John Sheridan, the Chief Technology Officer in the Department of Finance with the Australian Government. He'll be telling us about the Australian standard for ICT accessibility. Please make him welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

JOHN SHERIDAN: Thank you, Julie. Several years ago in this very building, I attended a meeting about accessibility in public procurement. I wasn't convinced at the time certainly initially, that there was much that we could do to advance the cause that was being put to us. My concern was that, at the time, there wasn't an international standard that could address ICT accessibility in public procurement. And it had been my experience that, generally speaking, when people joined the public service with a disability, we spent what was required to make sure equipment was accessible to them. But it was put to me that that wasn't enough. Indeed, I was given a very good explanation that I have used since then to explain to people why we needed to do something about this. It was suggested to me that I take a chair from my office, go to the nearest multifunction device – the big printers and photocopiers that we use now – and we tend to have one or two of on a floor. That I should sit in that chair next to the device and see if I could see the screen. And if I couldn't see the screen, then that device wouldn't be accessible to anybody who was confined to a wheelchair. I tried and, indeed, it wasn't. And of course, these are devices not that we replace every year or every two years, but we are much more likely to replace every five years or longer. I was convinced as a consequence that we needed to do something to explore – could we have an Australian standard that would help us in this regard?

As a consequence of my contact with ACCAN and with others, including in the Human Rights Commission, I became aware of the US Section 508 of their Rehabilitation Act and of the then-relatively new European standard, EN31459. I read about those standards and decided the first thing that we would do was test the equipment that we already were procuring to make sure, to discover, whether it was, indeed, accessible. More than 50% of the multifunction devices – printers, et cetera – on our panels were, indeed, accessible. The next time we went out for a mobile phone panel, I discovered that all the devices were essentially accessible. And more recently, in going out to buy computers across the Commonwealth, we specifically asked vendors to declare whether or not they met either 508 or EN31459. Not surprisingly, many did meet those standards. It was clear to me then that, in order to fit in with the Commonwealth procurement rules for which I'm responsible, what we needed to do was establish, since there wasn't an international standard and an Australian standard, so that buyers could use a standard, could refer to a standard, and purchase equipment and, indeed, software and hardware that was accessible.

Working with Standards Australia, we determined that the best way to do this was through a direct-text adoption of the European standard. This required us to get permission from the owners of the European standard, and then set up a committee that would run the process. We did that a couple of months ago, and I'm the chair of that committee. It then requires public consultation, which we are about to embark on. Public consultation looks like it will be relatively positive, because vendors have already indicated to us that they meet these standards generally. Australia isn't that large a market, and they produce equipment with these standards already for the US and European markets. As a consequence, given that direct-text adoption requires actually taking the text of the standard and adopting it only changing the things that absolutely need to be changed – references to Europe, for example, in the title and related things – we anticipate that direct-text adoption and the public consultation will be achieved relatively soon after going to the public. It won't be open for all that long.

As a consequence, I hope that, by the end of this year, we will have an Australian standard for accessibility in ICT public procurement. That standard will be able to be used by buyers both at the Australian Government level, but also in other jurisdictions. And it will guide them as to what they should do in order to buy equipment that is accessible. That won't mean that things will change immediately. Panels need to be refreshed when their lifetime expires. But I'm confident that what we will see is something that agency procurers can use in order to ensure that, when they are buying equipment and software in the future, that it meets the standards of accessibility. Thanks very much.

(APPLAUSE)

JULIE McCROSSIN: I found that presentation excellent, for a number of reasons. One was your impressive capacity to rattle off the standard numbers...

(LAUGHTER)

..just extemporarily. Would you agree that was duly impressive? It built confidence in me towards him as a Commonwealth public servant.

(LAUGHTER)

But I was also impressed by the fact that you remembered so vividly what had been suggested to you here, despite initial scepticism, and then he'd gone to Canberra, got a chair and sat beside a photocopier. Is that right, sir? I've got the nut of it? A round of applause for this responsive gentleman.

(APPLAUSE)

I'd now like to welcome Sue McGrath from the Council On The Ageing. Sue is the national policy manager. Please make her welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

SUE McGRATH: Thanks, Julie. I'd like to start off by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land in which we are meeting, and their eldest past and present. And thanks to ACCAN – COTA is delighted to be here and support this fantastic conference that you hold every year. It's always a delight to be here, so thank you so much for that. I know that what we're supposed to focus on here are the solutions and the ideas and the way forward for supporting the population groups that we're representing, but I just need to set a bit of a frame before I get on to some of those suggestions, because when we talk about older people, as I do all the time, I always have to point out that it's a very diverse group of people, even if we start at 65, and if we're in different environments, we sometimes start earlier when we're talking about older people in the employment space – it can be 50 and over, because age discrimination kicks in at 50. But if we're talking about 65 and over, with longer lives that we're all living, that can still be a 25- or 30-year life. So, all issues differ across that age span. There's also lots of other diversity. As Joe would know, 3 out of 10 older Australians were born overseas, and so there are a whole series of issues there – functionality and physical ability varies a great deal over that age span as well, and also across individuals. So I just wanted to set that scene before I made general statements, because one of the things that I think that happens in regard to the issue of the digital divide when we talk about older people is we have a mix of stereotypes that we bring into play and some reality and a lot of simplification that we bring into it. So I just want to refer to two sets of recent research that give us a bit of a clearer idea about older people and the digital divide. The first one is from the Australian Communications and Media Authority, ACMA. They found that the level – while the level of online engagement by Australians over 65 is lower than other age groups, the vast majority of older people are now participating online. 79% of older Australians have accessed the internet at some point in their lives, and when this study was done in 2015, 71% had been online in the three months prior to the end of the study. In keeping with Australia's early tech adopter reputation, these figures put us ahead of the UK and the US for older users. But I want to break that down a little bit more. The same research shows that there's a 9% difference between men over the age of 65 user the internet – 67% of them – and women over 65 using the internet. There's only 67%. That gender gap widens within the older subgroups to reach 16% difference between men and women aged over 80. The difference in those who've

never used the internet is even more marked as you go across the age groups. And it gets wider as you get older. So once you reach people over the age of 80, over 42% have never accessed it.

So, what does the research say that people do online? It's pretty much – older people? They do pretty much the same as everybody else, apparently. Email, banking, bill paying, buying and selling goods – it's just that older people do a bit less of it than other adult users in Australia. We also use social networking and communication sites, but to a much lesser extent than other adult age groups. The ACMA research found that, when it comes to the key activities of accessing government services and health and medical information online, older people have similar rates to the adult Australian population overall. But we lag a long way behind our older US and UK counterparts. And it's those underdeveloped habits in that area that are absolutely critically important as that growing push continues on. It's a juggernaut, towards digital by default government communications and service delivery. In income support, aged care, Medicare, taxation, the census, and many other spaces. This is particularly important in regard to health and the changes in health policy and health practice that are beginning to emerge and will affect older people significantly, and the ability for them to manage their own health records and data will be critically important. I just also want to refer to the Digital Inclusion Index, which unsurprisingly found that people over 65 are the least digitally included demographic. That's, of course, about the life course and that digital technology – it was a late entrant into the lives of older people. But the index authors also say that, in general, those with low levels of income, education and employment are significantly less digitally included, and older people, in general, fit that profile. And that's something to remember. It's not just about age and ability associated with that. I've got, like, 30 seconds left, so I'm going to say a few things that COTA argues for in this space. On the one hand, we say that it's a stereotype to consider older people resistant and incapable – many older people do learn. If they start from a low base, they learn to be digitally engaged, but we do recognise that – I think it's – yeah, it's around 1 million adult Australians, the bulk of whom are over the age of 65, have never accessed the internet. The COTA accepts that a group of those – particularly the older age group – will not become computer-literate. The question, Julie, is… Can I have another minute to say the things... I've gone over my time.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Yes, you can.

SUE McGRATH: Thank you very much! OK. Thanks for indulging me, everyone. What COTA argues with government and parts of the private sector, particularly the banking industry, is we speak up constantly for maintaining high-quality, properly resourced traditional communication channels, while face-to-face postal and telephone services, alongside digital transformation. We also argue that governments need to make transitions to online service delivery gradually, and to give those who are willing and capable the time to adjust. We argue for user-friendly, simple interfaces that remain as consistent as possible over a period of time without large numbers of rapid changes that people have got to adjust to. We also very much support the work done by a whole range of training organisations trying to support older people into digital literacy, and we note that the Federal Government's just made a commitment during the election campaign to invest $50 million into the digital skills and confidence of older people through a digital inclusion and online safety strategy for senior Australians. We'll be interested in engaging with them around that to take up some of the issues that I've raised here. So, thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

(APPLAUSE)

JULIE McCROSSIN: Just before I introduce our last speaker and then open it up to the floor, but just quickly, so I don't forget – I fall into that category with the middle-aged woman with the very elderly mother and there is a pack of us out there and we're crucial to access for older people. My mother is a self-funded retiree, so I know this is about access to government services, but if I could just say, in the private sector, there's an amazing variation about the degree to which it's easy as a person with enduring guardianship and enduring power of attorney, so the appropriate documents to allow you to stand in the shoes of a person and make both financial and other decisions, there's a real variety about the degree to which you can have digital access. So some banks will allow me to, as it were, pay my mother's bills online, and some won't. And I don't know if that's a factor in the government sector, but the other thing that I find really interesting from a security point of view is that you learn really quickly that if you try when dealing with human beings on behalf of your mother, whether it be by phone or by computer, but it's usually on the phone for this purpose, to actually say, "I'm not my mother, I

am..." so my mother is Margery McCrossin, and I'm Julie McCrossin, you soon learn that is a disaster but if you pretend to be a 91-year-old that works really well. And I'm not the only person doing it but the discovery is just how easy it is to be a 91-year-old woman! I don't sound like a 91-year-old woman. Is that a stereotype? But I don't sound like my mother. But the fact that I have such documents is a hint of a cognitive or disability. But it's so easy to just pretend you are a person that and there's surprisingly little checking around whether you have the appropriate documents and as I used to work at a place called the guardianship tribunal, which is a legal arm to do with substitute decision-making, so having these legal rights, I'm afraid there are a lot of families out there who are anticipating their inheritance and want access now. So I think there are some real security issues for older people. I hope that was considered a relevant small ex-temporary comment but now let's go to the young and our final speaker is Jacqui McKenzie from Youth Action, where she is policy and advocacy manager. Please make her welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

JACQUI McKENZIE: So, as introduced, my name is Jacqui, I am the manager of policy and advocacy at Youth Action. Youth Action is a NSW peak body for young people and the services that support them. You can find us on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter – we also have a website. I would also like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past and present. So I'm here to talk about young people and digital governance. Easy, right? Young people are online, government is moving online – I feel like a lot of the time when I talk about young people online, most people are complaining to me about how to get them offline. The government is moving online and into spaces and places where young people are and it is a really positive thing. But simply being online does not mean the service is accessible to young people. Most services are designed by adults for adults. But it means that these services often aren't suitable or don't cater to young people. When one in every five Australians are between the ages of 12-25, that's 4.6 million, then this is a really serious problem. And, yes, while young people are not children, nor are they adults. They're different to adults, they have different service needs and they have unique circumstances. So if you are online, but not connecting to young people, I'm here to tell you, it's not them – it's you. The biggest barrier to accessible services for young people is a lack of youth participation in service design. There are two primary drivers behind this – one, is the myth that young people are apathetic and the other is a misconception that they do not have the capacity or the expertise to contribute. Many people – and the mainstream media is a big player in this – portray young people as apathetic. They are not engaged they are selfish, they are the 'me' generation, they are hoodlums and frivolous and they are constantly connected to their iPhone. Does this sound familiar? Is this a theme anyone has heard come through in the media, on the train? I'm here to tell you that's incorrect. In July this year, Youth Action launched a milestone report called the Youth Development Index. It takes census data and NAPLAN and looks at how Australia is doing for young people. What this report showed was that the proportion of young people who are politically active has surged over the last decade. The thing is, young people are not apathetic, – they are just not interested in tokenistic, adult-centric systems. They are interested in genuine and real activities that are online or local – activities that enable them to take practical action and deliver real outcomes, outcomes they can touch and that are tangible. They are networked and they are organising. You need only look at, for example, the number of young people who are volunteering versus engagement and enrolment in political parties, for example. This is a trend that we need to tap into. The second persistent myth which stops young people being considered in service design is this idea of capacity and expertise – they're too young, they're too immature, they won't understand, we'll have to ask different questions, it's too hard, what would they know? And, yes, there is probably a whole lot of young people who are not experts in tax legislation or human service design, for example, but they are experts in their own experience and I think we've heard from other speakers today about how powerful that first-person experience can be in achieving change. We need to recognise that this experience is like no other we only need to look at the conversation that has been had over the past six months pointing out the inheritance of debt by this generation, changing in work, the cost of education, to see they are operating in a very different context even to what I experienced – and I'm not exactly an old soul. To fill the void when looking at service design we look at our own experience, whether we recall our teenage years and our experience of trying to get our first job, or as parents of young adults. But this will never equate to the understanding the diversity of young Australians, as was pointed out – young Australians are not a homogenous group. We need to hear their perceptions of services. One of the best examples – and it is not a good one, but it clearly kind of highlights the expertise that young people can bring, is a couple of years ago there was a push to reduce smoking in Aboriginal young people. So heaps of money was put into this campaign, lots of time spent trying to deliver this key slogan, and the slogan they came up with is, "Smoking is deadly". Now, for anyone who knows what deadly means,

essentially this campaign was telling Aboriginal young people that smoking was cool. And for me, I think, how much time and money and how more efficient would this process have been if we had just asked young people? Bringing young people's experiences and ideas into service design – design of online services – is just one side of the coin. The hard thing is changing our own behaviours and attitudes to take these ideas seriously and factor them into the decision-making process. We need to be asking at every single point of service creation, what can we learn from young people? How can we harness their experiences, their energy, their imagination and their creativity to deliver better and more accessible services? So an innovative solution, ask young people. We need to change the attitude and culture in our institutions. We need to consider youth participation as necessary. Not as a last thought in the process, where everything has already been designed. We need to leverage the opportunity that young people present and consider digital media as a way of communicating with young people, rather than at them. If we don't, digital media will amplify the lack of engagement with one-fifth of Australia, rather than enable it. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you so much. Now, there's two microphones but I wonder if you could pick up the one that's on the floor and turn it on and if you could turn yours on as well. It's just on the side – thank you. Can I just come to you, first of all, if I may, Jacqui, if you could take the mic. And, guys, if you can hold them close to your mouth. I was just surprised by what you said because, as a 61-year-old, I spend my life turning to people in a sort of 15-20 age bracket and asking them what to do. And I would have thought that was actually a common thing. But are you saying, at an institutional level, people don't approach young people in sort of focus groups to do design?

JACQUI McKENZIE: I think a lot of the time we rely too heavily on data and we don't actually speak to young people to get the understanding of how they interact with the services and systems we design. Another crucial problem is that – I am from the NSW peak body of young people, we've been around for around 30 years, but the Australian or the federal level advocacy peak body has been de-funded so that severely restricts the ability of the federal sector to understand and engage with those crucial networks.

JULIE McCROSSIN: OK, look, thank you. Look, I just want to quickly acknowledge that – you know how I made those quick remarks about being a substitute active person online for somebody else? I was handed this while you were speaking, Jacqui, and it's called Going Online On Behalf of Others: An Investigation of Proxy Internet Consumers" and it was developed by ACCAN with the Federation University Australia and Monash University. This is living proof of the amazing responsiveness of ACCAN! Because that occurred in a five-minute interval! Ladies and gentlemen, this is an opportunity now, of course, to ask questions or make comments and I guess the primary focus is your thoughts and views on key barriers to access to government services, but, most importantly, your suggestions on how to overcome those barriers, how to gain that access. And if people had examples of government responsiveness to share with us, that would be great, as well. So, who would like to begin – a question or a comment? Thank you very much. I'll just come over. If you can just introduce yourself?

>> Sure, Julie from The Smith Family. I would actually back up – and I'm sorry, I've forgotten name of the lady from the aged care sector?

JULIE McCROSSIN: Sue McGrath.

>> Yeah, what you were saying about how it's great to move digitally but you also need to keep those traditional methods of communication open. What we find with The Smith Family, you know, you are talking about disadvantaged people, you are talking about that lower income – you get challenges with bills these days from lots of agencies. You might miss a bill if you don't do that and you think, "I might have internet that week so I'll check it, but maybe I won't get it", so you are actually disadvantaging those that are already disadvantaged. So I absolutely support that.

JULIE McCROSSIN: The importance of face-to-face. Would you like to comment on that at all, Sue? Can you pass the microphones actively to each other?

SUE McGRATH: I completely agree with what you are saying and one of the points I think we need to recognise when we talk about government services is a lot of government services are directed towards more vulnerable

people at whatever age and the – there are many reasons economically, socially, capability-wise, all sorts of reasons why people might not be able to access services online, and therefore it's, I think, a particularly strong argument for governments to maintain well-funded – not just legacy systems that they're letting run down in these other ways, particularly telephone services, which anybody trying to get on to Centrelink by telephone will tell you, you can sit on there for hours and then just not get through. So they have to be proper services that are meant to support people to receive their services.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Could I just ask you, too, and perhaps I should really bring David in on this, as well, but again, I don't want to draw too much on my mother's experience, it's just that I spent a lot of time being a daughter to an elderly woman, but mum has been too deaf now for at least three or four years to deal with service providers by telephone and yet many services do require telephone contact and I'm just wondering, has Council On The Ageing got recommendations about that? Is that something that comes up in your work?

SUE McGRATH: It does and it would overlap directly into David's work, but I suppose the position that we take is that traditional modes – a lot of people still use snail mail, still use paper engagements, filling in forms, sending them in, receiving it that way, and that is one way in which people who are deaf or hard of hearing, you know, can engage with government, if that's still on offer. And if they're not having to be charged to receive bills in that format, et cetera. And face-to-face, the capacity for face-to-face – although I was really taken with what you had to say about the face-to-face situation and how that could be really overwhelming, as well. And in those cases, clearly, digital engagement could be a really valuable thing. But if your mother didn't have you to be doing that digital engagement for her, then it creates a real vacuum for people in that situation.

JULIE McCROSSIN: David?

DAVID BRADY: I think for the trial a lot of the people there said we can use internet, they can read, et cetera, but a lot of the people who are over 65 love the personal side. They like to go to a Centrelink, they like to go to Medicare, they like to see somebody, but the challenge is it's quite noisy, and you have captions and you have loops. And Auslan is another language, it is a second language, it is not like English and you can't do captions for people who use Auslan so if they need video relay or they can't get an interpreter at the appointment able to communicate in their language with the staff member at the same time – so that's one of the challenges that we have. People who are deaf and use Auslan can't read the forms or go on the internet. So for people to go into a Medicare or Centrelink centre with the form and say, "Can you please help me read this and translate it into my language", and that was one of the big trials we had in Queensland, the interpreter would explain quickly to that person what the form is about, but also the fact that one in four Australians will be deaf or hard of hearing in the next five to ten years, so what the Deafness Forum of Australia guide said was, you have to prepare your centres for that, just knowing that Australians are going to lose their hearing, like your mother, for example, and many others.

JULIE McCROSSIN: And as an ageing baby-boomer, we're often referred to as a tsunami, but many older people, in my experience, actually don't perceive themselves as deaf in the way that you are describing. In fact, many older people will deny they are deaf or that they need hearing aids in the face of all evidence to the contrary. So it really is a service provision challenge for government sector to – I mean, presumably rooms where you can go and get people away from the noise would be one important aspect. But sorry, Joseph, your comment?

JOSEPH CAPUTO: Yeah, well, as well as all the other issues that both Sue and David have mentioned, if you happen to be an older migrant who can't speak – you know, English is not your first language, then, you know, you need to have those face-to-face services to continue. So we will be advocating that, as more and more people are getting – using digital services, that will free up the various offices to be able to provide that face-to-face system and we will advocate to make sure that government doesn't get – you know, fall into the temptation of them closing up a lot of the services, rather than using them. Because the reality is that, as Sue mentioned, that there will be a significant number of older Australians, of, you know, English and non-English-speaking backgrounds, who will never be able to use the internet or what have you, so they still will need the face-to-face offices, shopfronts, to be able to access government services.

JULIE McCROSSIN: And, David, you let me know if you want to make a – sorry, I beg your pardon, John, if you let me know if you wish to make a comment. Just before I come to you, sir, there's someone here, Nigel Waters,

who has indicated to me – that is you, is it, Nigel? I will come with my microphone. A few people sent in questions in advance.

NIGEL WATERS: OK, thanks, Nigel Waters from ACCAN. It is a follow-up to that question. I am going to change the emphasis of my question because initially it was going to be, do you think that governments need to maintain those alternative channels but I will turn it around and be devil's advocate because won't there comes a point when the proportion of people requiring those alternative channels...

JULIE McCROSSIN: What do you mean by 'alternative'?

>> Like traditional, face-to-face, being able to do things by phone or by post, there will come a point when realistically governments are going to say, "We simply cannot afford to put the resources into the maintenance of those channels for such a small minority of people". So, I mean, is that a reality and, if that's the case, then what are the alternative ways that we have to look at providing for that very small number of people, potentially, in 10 or 15 years' time, that can't use online services? Is it intermediaries? Family friends? And, you know, should we put more emphasis into re-designing the way we provide those alternatives, rather than necessarily clinging on to, "Oh, we've got to keep the offices open," or, "We've got to keep the phone lines open," when that will reach a point, inevitably, where government simply says, "We can't afford to do it".

JULIE McCROSSIN: Can I come to you, John? And I'm not asking you to speak for all government services, that would be absurd, but there seems to be an assumption in that question of inevitability to the loss of face-to-face or voice-to-voice services. Your response to that suggestion?

JOHN SHERIDAN: Noting that that is not the area in which I work, but the government clearly is maintaining a range of channels for services. Yes, there's an emphasis on providing digital services, digital online services, because there's a demand for that that's obvious in the work that people have done, to explore how people would like to use government services. But there's not an intention, certainly as I understand it, to abandon all other channels now or in the future, and just concentrate on only digital online services. One of the things that we do see is that by moving those users, customers, citizens, who can use online channels to those channels, that that can take pressure off other channels and allow them to be more used by people who don't have the option of using digital services.

JULIE McCROSSIN: I suppose I would throw in a comment here, too, that – we're talking about the digital revolution which, to me, is as big as fire and the wheel in terms of its impact, and even as we speak, many people of all ages are using Skype as a means of talking to each other. Even what we think of as a face-to-face service is in the process of changing. But would anyone else on the panel like to respond to that? Thank you.

DAVID BRADY: I would like to challenge the assumption you were going to say about the diminishing of face-to-face services, because I... um, face-to-face and human interaction services is part of the future of Australian industry and society, because if we lose the contact with people, we might as well just all live in a cubicle for the rest of our lives. From a deaf Australian perspective, language and being part of and being physically with someone is very, very important. I might have mentioned about online and offline interpreters going to emergency departments or offline – but that's only a temporary measure until somebody is in the room. There's nothing better than someone in the room. You can go with somebody online but someone in the room, it is a big difference. When I do Hear For You mentoring, with young teens, they love the Skype and Snapchat and all of that but they realise that being in the same place as someone is a lot more powerful and they get more things done and it is part of the learning curve as well. So technology should be used to encourage that and not take away from that.

JULIE McCROSSIN: And I guess this is a room of advocates, we will advocate for the government services in a democracy that we think we need but there is a magic between two people and it works the other way. If you have an internet dating experience and then you meet the person, you sometimes don't like them.

(LAUGHTER)

Not that I'm speaking from direct experience!

JACQUI McKENZIE: Can I add something to that? One of the things we find is for some young people calling up someone on the phone who they don't know is a really hard thing to do. So services need to be friendly, wherever they are, whether they are online or in person, because I mean there's some services in NSW who only have a call-up service and the dropout rate for young people is really, really high because they don't have the training on how to respond to young people in crisis.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you.

>> Hi, look, this is a bit of a left-field question for this room but I had a question for John. I was just wondering if any of these problems could be addressed by advances in artificial intelligence and whether the government had been exploring any of those options?

JULIE McCROSSIN: Can you just explain what artificial intelligence is first?

>> I'm actually a robot, so it won't be hard!

(LAUGHTER)

The notion, of course, is that with increases in computing speed and computing power, what you can have is an intelligence assimilation, if you like, that somehow can react as if it were human. I think we are a long way short of that at this stage, but potentially in the future it could occur. There are a range of services that government already uses that, to some extent, use some of that intelligence. And not just governments – you can see them online, when there are sort of assistants on websites that say, "I think you are doing this, would you like to do that, could I help you with this?"

I know the taxation department uses voice recognition now – sorry, voice authentication, essentially, so they have the voice patterns of – people have done this voluntarily – of quite a large number of customers so they can be identified just by their voice, rather than by giving any other identification or something like that. So the use of technology is certainly increasing. There are the applications on mobile phones – those sorts of things that do make use of technology and allow people to get government services that way. But I think the important thing is the notion that they're not going to be right for everybody – there is still a need to maintain channels, other channels, for people who can't use those services.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you. I have a gentleman here. Can you just introduce yourself?

>> Sorry, I'm Tim Holborn. There's a lot of noise about autonomous cars but I haven't seen any noise about autonomous wheelchairs. There's a lot of open data, but it's difficult to find the toilet. Has there been any further thought around how the notion of supporting the development of accessibility services by government may contribute towards the ideas boom and exportable product?

JULIE McCROSSIN: Who would like to answer that question? This man asks questions that make me want to say, "And what's the answer"! ! But you go, thank you.

DAVID BRADY: The National Disability Insurance Scheme has been a bit of a revolution for what you are saying about the apps and the technology and the opportunity to actually create accessibility on apps. There was an expo I believe last year and I think some of the people in this room might have been to that. There were companies in Australia, young people and older generations, and smart computers generating apps where they could find toilets for people with disabilities, the best way to the lecture theatre here, if you have a wheelchair or mobility issues. The other one is using captions on demand, and those types of services. So I think it's more about – your question is probably more for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. There is that opportunity because more people will be looking at those particular apps and computer things to help them get more accessibility.

>> Just being more specific, it's more about the ability to export innovative technology using a sociological method of looking at advanced artificial intelligence technology. You wouldn't want a wheelchair to get run over by a person driving over their driveway, for instance, that is a very difficult problem. So therefore I would have thought that there's a level of opportunity or discreet opportunity whilst improving quality of life for Australians.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you. I might take that as a comment, if I may – so looking at commercial opportunities for new technologies that may improve access for our population, but that can be exported. Thank you. Is Jonathan Brown here? I think he wanted to ask a question.

>> Johnathan Brown from Consumer Action Law Centre. My question's about privatisation and commercialisation of services. Clearly, for quite a while now, there's been a push for government services to be commercialised or privatised. And so, say if you take the example of job networks for people going through Newstart, going through the Centrelink system – how do you make sure that, as our expectations of government in regards to access are getting higher and higher, that when governments shooting off all of these services to commercial services or not-for-profits, how do we make sure that those organisations reach those standards, particularly when they are so diverse? Again, back to the job network example, you might have one job network is a struggling not-for-profit that has computers from 10 years ago and is falling apart, and then another job network you as a job seeker might be going to is a commercial enterprise that isn't really interested in investing in access – they're trying to make a profit. So, as that process of commercialisation happens with government services, how do we make sure that those commercial operations keep their standards up?

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you. John, if you want to have a go...

JOHN SHERIDAN: I would answer that question from the point of view of procurement, which is essentially what I'm responsible for. The trick, in good government procurement, is making sure that you have the right requirements when you go to market, and then, if you're buying a service from the market, you ensure that you have the right service levels and you manage a contract properly to see that you are getting the service for which you are paying, and it's meeting the requirements that you contracted for. Now, it's relatively easy to say that, as you'd expect. And the Commonwealth procurement rules cover ways of achieving value for money, in setting service levels... We have a range of advice available online for Commonwealth buyers to do those sorts of things. But essentially, any service that you're going to need to – that you're seeking to buy, needs to run through those steps of discovering what is required, making sure it's defined in the right way without being too prescriptive – there's a challenge that says, um... Sort of, apocryphally, if you pay someone for time and materials and say, "The grass must never be longer than six inches," if you don't tell them not to over-fertilise it, they'll mow the grass every week and it'll cost five times as much as you were planning. You've got to manage those things fairly carefully. But there are a range of ways that governments would approach the market for services to ensure those things – including saying that there needs to be access in terms of people with disabilities or covering those things off. We regularly see that sort of requirement in approaches to the market.

JULIE McCROSSIN: So it's basically done by the law of contract.

JOHN SHERIDAN: Indeed.

JULIE McCROSSIN: I've got other questions that have been sent in, but I'm always happy to go to live questions by preference. Any other questions or comments people would like to make? I'd love it if you had examples where you think governments have been highly responsive. Teresa, could you help me if I need help with understanding this gentleman? Did you have a question?

If you don't mind, I'll just say what you've said so far. What I've got – and you correct me if I'm wrong – is that you're saying that, under the NDIS, there's attention, or potential conflict, between the desire of the provider to innovate, and the desire of the individual like yourself. Can you help me then?

TERESA CORBIN: I think Johnathan is saying – just nod if I've got it right – there's a competition between, there's competing interests between the individual's needs and the providers wanting to innovate and drive competition, but that the individuals' needs are not necessarily at the forefront.

TERESA CORBIN: I hope I'll do this justice, Johnathan! I got most of it. Basically, the users want to be at the coalface of the design, and they want to – Johnathan wants to know what the government might be able to do to help that. That really shortens what you said.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Can I just ask you – I know you're talking about users driving innovation, but can you give me an example of how you might want to drive innovation, just to help the panel respond?

>> For instance, emerging technology is virtual reality.

TERESA CORBIN: Emerging technology being virtual reality. What was the use that you were going to use it for?

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you very much. Again, I'm not sure who would like to respond, but it's a cry for being at the forefront and for government being responsive. Do you want to go first? Could you put it close to your mouth, David?

DAVID BRADY: Thank you for the question. Um... Yeah, I think there is fear in people with disability, especially in the National Disability Insurance Scheme about providers using technology and innovation to go forward and take over and not let the people with disabilities have their say. The National Disability Insurance Scheme, which is designed for people with disabilities to actually have a say in what they want and what they do, this is the role of the advocacy organisations like People With Disabilities Australia, Deafness Forum, all of those organisations – if the advocates are not advocating to make sure that – especially the government, who oversee the National Disability Insurance Scheme – have standards, to make sure that the technology doesn't overtake what the consumers have. You have a really good point. And yes, it is a fear of a lot of people with disabilities, especially around the NDIS. I also would like to point out that, with the young people, it's a great opportunity for young Australians to get together – especially those with disability – to work with young and even older Australians – to make that technology. Own it, and innovate. Our Prime Minister said we're going to be innovative, Australia. I'm not sure we're there yet.

JULIE McCROSSIN: He's having troubles numerically. It's called the numbers. Did you want to say something about that?

>> I disagree with the comment you made, David. I think we see lots of examples of young people who see a problem and they design a solution themselves, then they upscale it. There's the example of a young man who made a prosthetic arm from Lego when he was 14, and later at a conference met a young lady who described this prosthetic arm she had would cost $80,000, and it would take a couple of years. He designed a prosthetic arm that cost $400. So, there's young people leading in this area already. I think we need to pick up on that and scale up.

JULIE McCROSSIN: I have time for one more question or comment. Who would like to ask one? I know Nigel's got another one, but is there anyone who hasn't spoken yet, or has spoken, who'd like to ask a question or make a comment in this session? Did you put your hand up there? Here, thank you.

I have got some that are written down, so I'll just go to one of those that I have. Give me one second.

(PAUSE)

This goes to the standard. This new Australian standard sounds like it would be a useful resource. How can we ensure that it will be used by government procurers? Will there be a need to educate procurement officers on when and how – sorry, when, how and why accessibility matters?

JOHN SHERIDAN: Thank you for the question. We've already, actually, started doing that. We have regular networks that we speak to government procurement officials about. We publish guidelines on our intranet site so that people can get advice as to how to better buy and, indeed, how to better sell to government. So we provide that regular information to them. There is already a clause in the Commonwealth procurement rules that says when you should use standards and why you should use standards. So, the jump to doing that isn't enormously large. That said, the things that we buy in this area – desktop hardware, software, many of those are bought centrally by my team, so we have an advantage in that the people involved in that are already aware of this, and we've practised doing that now.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you very much. Look, ladies and gentlemen, would you please give our panel a warm round of applause?

(APPLAUSE)