

Accessible programming on TV

Australians with disability need greater access to television. ACCAN is calling for the implementation of Audio Description on free-to-air television and increased captioning across commercial television networks.

Australians with disability continue to struggle to have meaningful access to television.

Captions

While the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) includes mandates for captioning across both free-to-air (FTA) and subscription television (STV) the quotas are limited and do not provide equity of access for people who rely on captions when watching TV. Expanding the current 'primary channel' captioning quotas to cover all FTA channels will provide greater participation for all those Australians who rely on captions when watching television. Research indicates the incidence of hearing loss is 1 in 6 Australians and this is projected to increase to 1 in 4 by 2050¹. ACCAN's own research indicates that over 30 per cent of Australians use captions some of the time².

Audio Description

Audio description is a verbal commentary that complements the underlying soundtrack of a television program. It is designed to assist people with vision impairment and those with print and learning disabilities to enhance their understanding of what is happening on the screen. Research indicates that more than 500,000 Australians over the age of 40 had vision loss in 2009 and this number is projected to exceed 800,000 by 2020³.

Currently there is no audio described programming on broadcast television in Australia. Australia is the only English speaking OECD country with no audio described television. Amendments to both the BSA and the National Broadcasters charter to mandate audio description services across free-to-air television will help to ensure that all Australians are able to participate and benefit from the ubiquity of our primary medium for news, information and entertainment.

¹ 2007, Listen hear! The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia, Access Economics, viewed 24 May 2016, <<http://apo.org.au/node/2755>>.

² https://accan.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=298:research-on-caption

³ 2010, 'Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009', Access Economics, viewed 24 May 2016 <http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/resources/clear-focus-the-economic-impact-of-vision-loss-in-australia-in-2009>