



Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) Meeting Report

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Wednesday, 28 September 2016, 11.00am – 3.00pm

- PRESENT:** Dean Barton-Smith, ACCAN Board, Chair
Johanna Plante, ACCAN Board
Susan Thompson, Vision Australia
Kyle Miers, Deaf Australia
Dwayne Cranfield, National Ethnic Disability Alliance
Harold Hartfield, ACCAN member
Samantha French, People with Disability Australia
June Reimer, First People's Disability network
Daniel Kyriacou, Achieve Australia
- INTERPRETERS:** Kerrie Lakeman
Chevoy Sweeney
- APOLOGIES:** Matthew Wright, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
Jan Ashford, Communications Rights Australia
Roger Smith, Cochlear Australia
Jonathan Shar, ACCAN member
Steve Williamson, Deafness Forum of Australia
- ACCAN STAFF:** Teresa Corbin, CEO
Una Lawrence, Director of Policy
Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Advisor
Kelly Lindsay, Small Business & Consumer Engagement Officer

The purpose of the Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) is to identify the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representative in the consumers with disability /community's environment and the people they represent, with a view to using this information to inform ACCAN's disability work priorities for the 2016-17 year.

The following meeting report provides an overview of the main issues raised and discussed. This report will also be sent to invited representatives who were unable to attend.

ACCAN Activities and Summary of Outcomes in the past 12 months

ACCAN staff provided a brief outline of several major consumer issues and a summary of ACCAN's outcomes in the past 12 months.

Consumer Protection

TIO complaint numbers are down overall; however there has been a slight increase in complaints with regards to nbn connections, nbn rollout issues and telecommunications outages.

Deregulation continues to be an area of focus and some positive outcomes should be mentioned such as:

- TCP Code revisions: consumer protections such as penalties for misleading & disruptive conduct have been retained
- Piracy: the Copyright Notifications Code did not proceed beyond draft stage, and proposal for service disconnection for illegal downloading dropped.

Availability

Availability continues to be a top priority for ACCAN with some developments in this area including:

- Regional Telecommunications Review concluded: Consumer Safeguards review and USO Productivity Commission Inquiry are currently underway.
- The Mobile Black Spots Programme Round 1 has started rolling out, Round 2 applications have closed and a further \$60 million committed for Round 3.
- 2nd edition ACCAN Community Kit publication relaunched to assist communities in the MBSP.
- Sky Muster satellite services commenced 29 April. Education data to be quarantined. There are still concerns about fair use policies and T&Cs, and ACCAN is keen to hear any feedback from consumers. The 2nd satellite will launch in October.
- Independent broadband performance monitoring to increase reliability and quality of broadband services. ACCC Monitoring Pilot was conducted last year, and the ACCC is now consulting on broadband speed claims. ACCAN's survey at the beginning of the year confirmed that consumers are not clear on what causes poor broadband performance.
- We have released our interactive [ADSL availability map](#) which identifies areas currently receiving poor or no internet.
- ACCAN has been on a committee aiming for an Australian standard for 'best practice' ICT procurement and the adoption of the European Standard EN 301 549.
- Approaching the election, one of ACCAN's key election issues was increased captioning on television and online political video messaging and the introduction of Audio Description on television.

Affordability

- One key win for ACCAN in this space is that mobile calls to 1800 numbers are now mostly free, with only two MVNOs (mobile virtual network operators) still charging at the old rate due to fixed agreements with their wholesaler not making it viable to adopt the change.
- 13 numbers still need more work especially with essential services like Centrelink using 13/1300 numbers.
- ACCAN has published an [Affordability Map](#) identifying populations experiencing financial barriers to telecommunications services. .
- ACCAN is working with SACOSS to advocate for a review of the Centrelink Telephone Allowance (CTA).
- The Digital Inclusion Index was launched by Telstra at the ACCANect Conference in September.

Actions:

1. *ACCAN to circulate Australian Standards - Public procurement - ICT paper.*

Participant feedback on headline issues

Real Time Text (RTT)

- Benefits for all consumers, not just consumers with disability.
- RTT is superior to SMS which stores prior to sending and isn't a prioritised service.
- There are significant benefits for deaf/blind consumers; however compatibility with deaf/blind equipment may present issues and needs further investigation.
- There is a trend towards 'any provider' rather than only through the universal service provider Telstra.

National Disability Telecommunications Service (NDTS)

- There is still a lot of work to be done regarding the Government's commitment to accessible websites. The Digital Transformation Office (DTO) is difficult to engage with regarding disability issues.
- With the start of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) next year, there are concerns around the consistency of the skill sets of assessors. They include;
 - Not all NDIS assessors are employees of NDIS, some are from support agencies such as The Salvation Army and Brotherhood of St Lawrence.
 - Many of these assessors may not have the skills or information to adequately understand disability or the range of equipment / services required/ for the person they are assessing.
- Any NDTS would need to be affordable and take into account that not everyone needing the service will be funded under NDIS.
- Needs to include a disability equipment program not tied to one provider. It needs to be mobile and able to access 'fast broadband'.
- ACCAN to consider the Job Access Portal, DSS model, Dwayne will provide contact details for Helen Green.

- Disappointment was expressed by participants that the telco and Communications Alliance disability consultative forums no longer meet.
- ACCAN's role and the NDTs: ACCAN could be a valuable coordinator of services with the ability to educate and inform consumers regarding mainstream technology advances and traditional disability specific equipment. ACCAN's research could provide valuable information regarding consumer use and trends. However, concerns were raised regarding the resourcing and funding limitations of ACCAN delivering such a service.
- A NDTs would benefit from being independent of NDIS.
- The participants endorsed the goals of a NDTs and the need for a 'one stop shop'.
- Funding models discussed included;
 - A levy on all telecommunication consumers
 - Funds from NDIS
 - Levy on telcos
 - Private sector

Audio Description

- Many organisations are now on-board to support changes to the Broadcasting Act. The Greens have agreed to support this through the Parliamentary process.
- The participants agreed that the provision of audio description needs to be treated as a human right and be pursued legally as a disability discrimination case.

Deafblind Consumers

- 'Deafblind' needs to be added as a specific category to the National Relay Service requirements.
- There needs to be a solution to provide equipment/maintenance/support and training.

Other Issues

- Lack of availability of affordable fast broadband to consumers in regional and / or remote areas. There is much work to be done.
- Telcos to provide 'people' to be available for consumers, particularly consumers with cognitive disabilities. A person is needed at the end of the line with local knowledge who is able to provide assistance regarding the location of the nearest storefront etc.
- Consumers' cultural considerations need to be addressed by telcos.
- Some consumers may have English as a second language or no English; only Auslan.
- Cultural considerations need to be addressed by the industry.
- The new USO needs to include free access to priority assistance and directory assistance for free.
- Consumers need strong consumer protections against telcos who use upselling tactics, often signing them up for commitments that they cannot afford or do not need.

Future policy directions and research opportunities

Support was confirmed for ACCAN's priority work on:

- NDTs
- Communications support for deaf blind consumers
- Real time text
- Affordability of services for people with disability
- Easy to understand and available information about telecommunications services
- Continued support for peak body campaigns (e.g. Vision Australia's work on audio description; Deaf Australia's work on captioning)

Participants suggested research and policy opportunities on the following topics;

- NEDA offered ACCAN access their geospatial mapping research regarding disability across the nation by cultural background, to inform the development of a NDTs.
- Strong support for Mystery Shopper research Mark II.
- Consideration of a consumer rating system to give the industry an incentive to improve their service. Would need to have criteria which were measurable by the PwD communities.
- Apple staff are signing customers up to telco contracts, but feedback is that staff are not adequately trained in contract details. Work is needed to educate Apple staff in this area.

Suggested strategies

- ACCAN's role as a consumer support service - encouragement to seek opportunities to align with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).
- Additionally, ACCAN should think outside of the NDIS model, as it may not be the right model.
- Funding for NDTs – consideration could be given to approaching the private sector for sponsorship and funding, although it was noted that this can involve other complexities. TED talks could be run as a way of promotion.
- Continue to build relationships and use peak organisations to disseminate information and gain support.
- Use a 'narrative' approach for effective communication and advocacy. Make sure that the story is told about the individual person with disability to bring issues alive.
- Consider reaching out to Samsung about being a Champion for accessibility.

Conclusion

The feedback and suggestions made at the Disability Advisory Forum will be used to inform ACCAN's policy priorities, policy focus, operations plan and research activity plan. These will be circulated to members of the Forum when finalised.

It was also noted that a review of ACCAN's Strategic Plan will be completed over the next 12 months. This includes a contract review conducted by the Department of Communications.

ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin, thanked the DAF participants for their time and valuable contributions.