Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Disability Advisory Forum

Meeting Report

Wednesday, 30 March 2022, 2:00PM – 4:30PM
by videoconference

PRESENT:

Duncan Steward	Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
Hayley Stone	Physical Disability Council NSW
Alice Batchelor	Physical Disability Council NSW
Joza Cabral	Physical Disability Council NSW
Michaela Mead	Physical Disability Council NSW
Denise Boyd	STAR Victoria
Bruce Maguire	Vision Australia
Susan Thompson	Vision Australia

ACCAN:

Nadia Moffatt	Chairperson (ACCAN Board Director)
Andrew Williams	Chief Executive Officer
Wayne Hawkins	Director of Inclusion
Kelly Lindsay	Member and Outreach Coordinator
Andres Merlano	Accessible Telecoms Project Manager
Vaughn Bennison	Disability Policy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Julie Phillips	Board of Communication Rights Australia
Jane Britt	Blind Citizens Australia
Dr Scott Hollier	Centre for Accessibility Australia
Jen Blyth	Deaf Australia
Steve Williamson	Deafness Forum of Australia
Andrew Stewart	Hearing Connections

The purpose of ACCAN's Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) is to identify the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representatives in the disability community, with a view to incorporating these into ACCAN's future policy priorities for the 2022-23 year.

The following meeting report provides an overview of the main issues raised and discussed. DAF participants are welcome to use this document in reporting back to their organisations. This report will also be sent to invited representatives who were unable to attend.

ACCAN distributed the following documents prior to the meeting to provide background for the discussions:
- Meeting Agenda
- ACCAN Policy Priorities – 2021-2022
- ACCAN Environment Scan – 2022

1. Welcome

Introduction
The chair opened the meeting at 2:05PM with an acknowledgement of country and welcomed attendees.

Disability Advisory Forum Goals
Wayne Hawkins, ACCAN's Director of Inclusion outlined the goals of the forum:

- The DAF sits alongside Member Advisory Forum, Small Business Advisory Forum and Indigenous Advisory Forum
- ACCAN relies on input from the Disability Advisory forum to understand telecommunications issues which lead to harm, isolation and disadvantage for people with disability in Australia
- Outcomes from this forum inform ACCAN's work and assist with prioritising disability issues

2. Summary of outcomes in past 12 months

Summary of Highlights
Andrew Williams, ACCAN Chief Executive Officer, outlined highlights for ACCAN over the past twelve months.

- Departure of long-term CEO, Teresa Corbin, in October.
- In September, ACCAN held its first online conference with record attendance and contributions from people all over Australia.
- ACCAN has been responsive to the impact of Covid-19, leading to greater staff diversification as a result of the hybrid working environment. The changes brought about by the pandemic have also led to downsizing of ACCAN's office building and more efficient, online work practices.
- As a result of the move to an online model of operation, ACCAN has been able to access greater input from national stakeholders. In particular, this has led to a series of Round Tables in each state with NBN co.
- The ACCAN board now has a New Indigenous representative, Dr Scott Winch.
- ACCAN contributed significantly to the Regional Telecommunications Review, and has become increasingly involved with digital platforms particularly around accessibility and consumer impact.
- Convergence of Telecommunications platforms and modes is increasing and ACCAN is heavily involved with online privacy and safety where they pose a significant risk to consumers.

- ACCAN is proud of the work done on Accessible Telecoms, and its place as an information hub for people with disability. ACCAN is committed to ensuring it continues to provide a strong and enduring service to the disability community.
- ACCAN's funding from the Department of Communications has been extended for a further five years.

3. Background briefing - Accessible Telecoms

Andres Merlano, Accessible Telecoms Project Manager, outlined the project and its importance for seniors and people with disability who seek answers to questions on appropriate devices, apps, accessories and more.

- Accessible Telecoms has been running since 2018.
- The database now holds 229 mobile phones, 70 landline phones, 12 satellite phones, more than 30 tablets and 15 groups of accessories and apps which assist people with disability to use communications equipment
- The website is fully accessible, and consumers can contact Accessible Telecoms through its chat function, by calling the 1800 number, and via E-mail.
- Accessible Telecoms has seen a considerable increase in interest in the last twelve months, in part owing to radio advertising on the RPH network. The Google ranking appears to be quite high with a significant number of consumers coming to the AT website from Google searches.
- The product database can be searched in a number of ways – by impairment type, device type or accessory.

4. Discussion of Accessible Information and Communications Technology Procurement – The Community Position

Vaughn Bennison, Disability Policy Officer, outlined ACCAN's work on updating the Community position on the Government procurement of Accessible Information and Communications Technology.

- Accessible ICT Procurement is about ensuring that all technology purchased by or on behalf of Government or an organisation is fully accessible to consumers with disability, both as employees and members of the general public.
- Organisations will be asked for contributions to, and feedback on the updated Community position statement. Once this has been provided, ACCAN will issue the final statement to organisations, requesting formal support for the adoption of the position across the sector.

5. Accessible Communications Roadmap Issues
a. Proof of Identity for people with disability

Vaughn Bennison outlined ACCAN's work on the Ideal Accessible Communications Roadmap, particularly focusing on issues surrounding the provision and verification of identity for people with disability.

- The roadmap is an aspirational outline of what it would take for communications in Australia to be completely accessible to people with disability.
- These issues significantly impact people with disability particularly in terms of consumers being able to provide requested identity documentation and verification.
- The Government's Trusted Digital Identity Framework appears to have stalled. If adopted, this could have a significant positive affect on people with disability transacting business with telecommunications providers.

- The list of category A documentation needs to be increased to take into account forms of identification typically available to people with disability – not just driver's licences and passports.
- Disability organisations have been advocating in this area and it is clear that some telcos and Government organisations are considering options.
- ACCAN met with Telstra to advocate on behalf of consumers, and the need for tighter proof of identity requirements under recently adopted industry codes gives us the opportunity to advocate further in this area.
- Discussion around the lack of overlap between identity requirements across sectors – different forms of ID being required by different organisations ETC.
- ACCAN has a document which outlines proof of identity requirements for Telcos.

6. Updates on television access features

Wayne Hawkins outlined updates to accessibility for Australian Free to Air and Subscription Television

- Amendments to the Broadcasting legislation in 2021 incorporated a "disallowable instrument". This would mean the minister can determine the rules for captioning on Subscription television services. This instrument has not yet been passed so captioning rules, at present, remain unchanged.
- There is no legislated requirement for accessibility to online streaming entertainment platforms. ACCAN has submitted to the Media Reform Green Paper around provision of accessible content and platform accessibility to these services.
- The Government has agreed to establish an advisory committee to investigate outcomes from that report, ACCAN will have a seat on that committee.
- Audio Description will continue on ABC and SBS, with funding to continue at the same level as for the past two years.

7. ACCAN's Environment Scan 2022

Wayne Hawkins outlined ACCAN's Environment Scan for 2022. This document outlines background information across the communications sector. Of particular focus was ACCAN's priority around accessibility.

- Outcomes from the past twelve months include improvements to and increased use of, Accessible Telecoms, submissions to potential changes to broadcast and streaming television captioning rules, further identification of pain points for communications consumers with disability.
- The Ideal Accessible Communications Roadmap underpins ACCAN's work on issues affecting people with disability.
- ACCAN recently met with the Disability Discrimination Commissioner to discuss follow-up from the Human Rights and Technology report and outcomes from Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31, and how ACCAN's work might feed into the work the Commission is doing on furthering those outcomes and the fostering of digital inclusion for people with disability.
- Standards Australia has been discussing the adoption for a standard which feeds into the procurement of ICT; standardising the way procurement is handled across the Government sector.

8. Telecommunications and Disability Inclusion

Vaughn Bennison led a discussion on ways the telecommunications sector could be more inclusive – referencing improved identification and verification provisions, improved front-line staff disability awareness training and better and more accessible services.

- ACCAN's 2022-24 Disability Inclusion Action plan was recently adopted by the board and will soon be published on ACCAN's website, and the Australian Human Rights Commission website.

Discussion Points:

- Research indicates that only Telstra and Optus have fairly robust inclusion strategies. Several other telcos reference Accessible Telecoms as being useful for people with disability.
- There appears to be an appetite for disability awareness and inclusion in recent years. It is important to understand why this has not been achieved thus far and develop a strategy for cross-sector involvement in the promotion of inclusion.
- Many states have inclusion legislation, however this is not likely to prove useful or enforceable on the telecommunications sector. Stronger commonwealth regulation may provide the answer.
- should telcos look at disability inclusion through a similar lens to reconciliation? Could reminding telcos of Australia's responsibility for compliance under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of people with disability, and companies' responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act have significant effect?
- Communications is considered by many as essential to daily life. Ideas on inclusion may be gleaned from the banking sector.
- Employing people with disability makes good business sense considering that 30 percent of Australians are affected by disability and the NDIS provides over $30 billion in funding. International evidence indicates that Employment of people with disability encourages diversity and gives consumers with disability confidence that the telco understands their needs.

9. Other topics of interest

The floor was opened for discussion of other topics of interest to the attendees

Discussion topics:

- Inclusion is vital for emergency preparedness, ensuring people with disability have the information they need in disaster or emergency situations. Government regulation may assist to ensure people have access to this information as well as equipment and services they may need in these situations.
- Telecommunications providers should demonstrate inclusive practices to ensure they understand their responsibilities in emergencies.
- Perhaps regulation and legislation could serve as the bedrock of change across the telco sector, with Australia's Disability Strategy as the instrument providing leverage. As well, the Human Rights and Technology report published by the AHRC contains recommendations pertinent to increasing digital inclusion. Encouraging regulation has historically proved difficult but necessary.
- Recognition of the diversity of the disability community makes advocacy complex. This has been true for accessibility to broadcast and streaming television – whilst conceptually Audio Description and Captioning are similar, they are represented differently. Perhaps we need to broaden our thinking around captioning and AD into thinking about accessibility rather than separating them.

- The fact that little regulation exists around streaming Media services represents a good opportunity to present a cross-sector initiative to improve access for people with disability.
- Perhaps a follow-up meeting of forum participants is required to develop a cross-sector strategy to promote inclusion. This strategy might include the encouragement of setting quotas or targets for employment of people with disability across the communications sector.

10.Meeting wrap-up and close

The chair thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting was wound up at 4:35PM.

Action List

ACCAN to work with Telco sector to standardise ID requirements across the board, considering inclusive practices ETC.

ACCAN to request update on the Digital Identity Framework and it's likely acceptance by Government