



2019 Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) Meeting Report

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Wednesday, 5 July 2019, 11.00am – 3.00pm

PRESENT:

Dean Barton-Smith	ACCAN Board, Chair
Bruce Maguire	Policy Lead Vision Australia
Steve Williamson	CEO Deafness Forum of Australia
Leonie Jackson	CEO the Deaf Society NSW
Kyle Miers	CEO Deaf Australia
David Murray	CEO Deafblind Australia

Guest speakers:

Kath Silleri	Department of Communications and the Arts
Chris Allen	Concentrix
Brian Harkin	Concentrix
Peter Monk	Concentrix

APOLOGIES:

Dwayne Cranfield	National Ethnic Disability Alliance
Samantha French	People with Disability Australia
Nick Rushworth	Brain Injury Australia
Meredith Lea	ACCAN Disability Policy Officer

INTERPRETERS:

Kerrie Lakeman
Rebecca O'Brien

ACCAN STAFF:

Teresa Corbin, CEO
Wayne Hawkins, Director of Inclusion
Andres Merlano, Accessible Telecoms Project Officer

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 using this information to inform ACCAN's future disability policy priorities.

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.

1. ACCAN update

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

Key issues discussed;

Rural and Regional Communications:

- Work on mobile black spots and data in remote areas where data is used via satellite services.
- Government has committed funding for digital tech hubs (They will be a support service for people in remote areas).

Affordability:

- There are no low priced options for NBN services. Base plans are already too expensive for many people on low income or income support. Up to a million households won't be able to afford NBN services. This means that many people will be forced on to alternatives that may not meet their needs for online connectivity.
- ACCAN has developed the No Australian Left Offline policy position. This position advocates for a subsidy for nbn services for low income consumers. ACCAN has strong support from our membership for this position. ACCAN has met with many politicians to raise awareness of this issue.

Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code:

- This is a win for consumers. The code was announced this week and will promote better practices in selling. The regulator believes the new Code will enable better awareness of poor selling practices and the lack of affordability checks.
- Credit assessments will be required for anyone who buys a product that costs more than \$1000, or \$45 per month.
- People on prepaid services wanting a new prepaid service will not be upsold to post-paid service; they will need a new credit check for that. This comes as the media is reporting about indigenous people being sold gadgets that are expensive and then find out they can't afford it later as the contracts are pushed to them without understanding of the debt.

Consumer Data Rights:

- Right to take our data with us when we leave a provider and potentially take it to a new provider. This will be important in the future, but nothing to report yet.

Artificial Intelligence:

- Wayne has participated in some events and consultations regarding to ethical use of AI. This area has implications to all consumers and potential concerns for consumers with disabilities. ACCAN will continue to participate in these ongoing consultations as it will become a big area in the next year or so.

Data use in Regional Areas by People with Disabilities:

- Satellites in some rural areas are locked to 50GB of data per person. However, some Deaf people need extra data as they rely heavily on video for communications. Teresa noted that a new satellite service from NBN called Skymuster Plus will have metered and unmetered data. Details have not been published yet, but metered data will include video and streaming and unmetered will include web browsing and emails. Teresa raised the issue of isolating video streaming and asked nbn to talk to DoCA to find a way to isolate the video relay service. Teresa believes we will get there.

NDIA and My Aged Care registration forms:

- The online application process for NDIA and My Aged Care relies on the Department of Health and Social Services calling the customer to proceed with the application. The process allows for 3 calls and if unattended the process is stopped. A letter is sent to customer notifying them that the process was cancelled. The letter also asks for a friend to help the application which can be considered inappropriate as they cannot be independent in completing an application form.
- Suggestions were made to include a tick box indicating SMS text communications. This issue will be raised with the DoCA as well and hopefully will start continue a conversation to reach the DHSS.

2. Background briefing and ACCAN accessibility policy directions for discussion and feedback 2019/20

Wayne gave an update on ACCANs key disability priorities as outlined in the DAF briefing papers that were circulated to the members prior to the meeting. These included;

National Relay Service

Key issues discussed were:

- ACCAN is still in information gathering stage about the new service provider and the changes to the provision of some relay services.
- It was noted that there should be an outreach program that could be set up by organisations that use the NRS to provide tutorial and instructions about the NRS so that NRS users and new users can make the most of the service.

- It was noted that there are students in schools that have no idea of the NRS.
- There was a question about how can we maintain NRS, and grow its capacity to radio serviced areas (?)
- There was a proposal to implement a telecommunications bill surcharge similar to the US model to increase the funding for NRS.
- There is a concern about SMS for emergency services, via the NRS, what will be the future of 000 under the new NRS contract.
- The Deafness Forum stated their membership wants an extension of the transition away from Captel service, suggesting that the transition be 5 years to allow Captel users to become confident with alternative services.
- It was noted there is a need for clarification of the technologies that will be used to replace Captel, as the transition time is too short.
- It was suggested that a type of user registration system could be proposed as an opt-in option, this would help the government identify which technologies are needed, and who are using them (Captel, NRS services, etc.).
- These and other issues were flagged to be raised with the representatives from the Department of Communications and Concentrix later in the day.

A full summary of the NRS discussion is provided in detail below.

Audio Description

Key issues discussed were:

- ACCAN continues to support Blind Citizens Australia in the advocating for AD.
- A coalition of blindness and consumer organisations held an AD event at Parliament House including meeting with parliamentarians.
- The re-elected Coalition Government has been approached for meetings with these groups to discuss progressing AD.
- Consumer groups have had discussions with the ABC – the ABC is unable to progress AD without additional funding.
- Consumer organisations will be working with Greens and Labor to progress an amendment to the BSA this year.
- ACCAN discussed Audio Description with the Minister of Communications Paul Fletcher (pre-election).
- **Action: Wayne Hawkins to include David Murray in the Audio Description discussion with Blind Citizens Australia.**

Television captioning

Key issues discussed were:

- ACCAN has commissioned a research project to evaluate the quality of live captions on free-to-air television and will share the results with the forum members when it is finalised.

- It was noted that The World Federation of Deaf and International Organisation of Hard of Hearing issued a statement on the use of voice recognition technology for telephone relay services and live captioning.¹
- Conclusion in the Forum was to promote further research of Artificial Intelligence technology and include human interaction to ensure accuracy.
- ACCAN recently made submissions to ACMA opposing the draft captioning exemption orders for pay television services.
- **Action: Wayne to provide recommendations from Live Caption Quality research to members.**

Public procurement of accessible ICT

Key issues discussed were:

- ACCAN continues to engage in promoting the public procurement of accessible ICT.
- ACCAN Continues to engage with Digital Transition Agency to promote accessible online government services and information.
- It was noted that there needs to be more focus on WCAG AA adoption by government and business. WCAG A is not adequate.
- It was noted that both NDIA and My Aged Care online application processes create barriers for Deaf and hearing impaired consumers. The agencies make 3 phone contacts and if no answer cancel applications. This issue was raised with Kath Silleri who will raise it with inter-agency contacts.

Accesshub

Key issues discussed were:

- ACCANs contract with DoCA to undertake Accesshub focus groups was discussed.
- There was concern from the members that ACCAN was undertaking the focus groups with Expression Australia, a service provider and not a Disabled Peoples Organisation (DPO).
- ACCAN acknowledged the ongoing funding concerns for DPOs and disability advocacy.
- ACCAN noted that the focus groups were funded by DoCA on a cost-recovery basis only.

The costs include: Focus groups facilitation, Venue costs, Interpreter fees, other accessibility costs (such as live captioning), Payment to focus group participants, including travel allowance and Report writing.

ACCAN will not receive any project management fee for undertaking the consultation for DoCA.

- ACCAN also noted that both Wayne and Meredith have provided significant in-kind investment on ACCAN's behalf to ensure that the focus groups are able to consult with the NRS user community.

¹https://www.facebook.com/Wfdeaf.org/posts/2100792816656241?comment_id=2122528934482629&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D

3. Andres Merlano provided a short update and presentation of the Accessible Telecoms project.

Key issues discussed;

- It was suggested that it would be ideal if the deafblind community and Auslan Users were included in the access needs as a separate category. They believe a full Deaf person should be part of the committee in order to properly understand their needs. Wayne explained the reasoning behind the AT categories.
- The IDEAS website is being updated to have a more contemporary look and feel. IDEAS was chosen to host the Accessible Telecoms project because of their existing call centre capabilities, as the service was planned to be driven by calls but it's been mainly driven by online contact.
- A marketing and events strategy is in place to help promote the project.
- It was suggested to consider using a logo without a wheelchair on it.
- There was discussion about using IDEAS as it is a NSW funded entity. Wayne noted that the Accessible Telecoms contract with IDEAS stipulates that AT funds are separate from the NSW funding for IDEAS services.

Action: Wayne will take the advice about including a deafblind section on board for the committee.

4. National Relay Service briefing (DoCA and Concentrix)

Concentrix gave an overview of the company and outlined how it would be providing the NRS services.

Key issues discussed;

- Concentrix has been in Australia for over 15 years. Initially operated under IBM brand and then sold to Concentrix.
- They have two call centres in Australia (Ballarat and Brisbane).
- They employ 1200 people and service all types of channels, such as voice, chat, social media, messaging and now all the channels for NRS.
- They will also introduce a new text-and-listen service in the NRS.
- Concentrix also supports Centrelink, cashless debit card for the Department of Social Services and several State government departments for QLD, NSW and Victoria.

Q and A:

The following questions were raised during the discussion of the new NRS contract.

Question	Response
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Question	Response
<p>NRS funding is 10 million shy of the real cost, how are you able to deliver the best result in that situation?</p>	<p>DoCA has responsibility for the budget; it has been \$22 million per year since the 2013 Contract. Costs have exceeded that in recent years. DoCA trusts that Concentrix will be able to deliver the service using the budget of \$22million per year or 66million over three years. There is an expectancy of costs to be higher during the set up phase and then stabilize after this. DoCA mentioned that the same level of service will be provided, “not more cheaply but more effectively”.</p>
<p>TTY Emergency Service number 106 and Triple Zero, will they continue?</p>	<p>#106 is not cancelled; the number is still operational for TTY users. Other NRS users can continue to request a call to Triple Zero through their preferred service option.</p> <p>There is no change to access to the emergency call service for NRS users.</p> <p>SMS to 000 (triple zero) is being consulted in the review of the Emergency Call Service Determination. Video Calling and Social media access to triple zero are also being discussed. Telstra (the 000 operator) is implementing a network upgrade that will make the triple zero service more reliable.</p>
<p>How will Concentrix guarantee quality assurance to their consumers?</p>	<p>Concentrix is currently revamping training programs with schools, Federation University, and hopefully with ACCAN and similar organisations to set quality and performance reviews and standards. They will create dedicated quality teams to monitor quality standards.</p>
<p>Concerns about future of Captel. There is uncertainty, as information about the new “better” solution has not been provided to the public.</p> <p>Would a 5 year transition to Captel be considered by DoCA?</p>	<p>Captel is a brand, the service will continue but not the brand. Individuals that use Captel are very diverse, so Concentrix is creating different options to suit different types of people. So far they have been able to reach about 50 users for input. DoCA asked for help reaching more people to be part of the project, in order to help them transition to a new service.</p> <p>There are only 4000 Captel devices in distribution in Australia. DoCA will not be able to offer the service past January of 2020 and this is not in DoCA’s power. Captel is a proprietary license system. The option of an extension is not something DoCA can achieve.</p>

Question	Response
<p>How will DoCA involve organisations and community in the changing processes they are leading? I.e. NRS and Accesshub. Students and clients of disability organisations are not aware of NRS services or their changes, and feel that they are not being informed of the services that they could use.</p>	<p>This is a multi-party conversation. DoCA had a consultation process in 2016 which included consideration about the effectiveness of an outreach program and decided that this money could be channelled to help the NRS and other programs.</p> <p>DoCA welcomes the opportunity to talk with all people in the community for feedback and to help construct the Accesshub services.</p>
<p>How is Concentrix going to provide a better NRS service?</p>	<p>The primary focus of Concentrix for the next 6 months to a year is to have a seamless transition from the current service.</p> <p>The 2 call centres will provide backups to one another in case a site goes out, and that is an immediate improvement to the current operation (one call centre).</p> <p>Concentrix will continue the Auslan service in Brisbane to provide re-employment opportunities for current NRS staff.</p> <p>Concentrix client base includes tech companies like Uber, Microsoft, Amazon, Apple and Samsung, and their experience can be leveraged to provide a better user experience to NRS users in the future of the program.</p> <p>DoCA is confident that Concentrix will provide an excellent relay service and a seamless transition to this service.</p>
<p>What will happen with older users that can't use a computer?</p>	<p>The obvious option is a TTY. DoCA is also willing to provide training to people, even going to their places if needed. This will be defined once DoCA receives enough information on this matter.</p>
<p>Will the registration of users be considered by DoCA? Opt-in Option?</p>	<p>DoCA will pursue that, but this will be discussed after the transition to the new service. DoCA considers that there is greater benefit if users register, as it is useful to know what services are used, per area, and time of day, and other statistics.</p>
<p>Can the DoCA work with the NDIS to help people acquire new digital equipment, as old TTY and other old Telco equipment are being discontinued.</p>	<p>DoCA has conversations with organisations related to the NDIA about unmetered services for NRS. In the case of TTYs, there are still plenty available, but DoCA agrees that NRS is going on the path of using mainstream tech.</p>
<p>Deaf people trusted their NRS officers with medical and private information during</p>	<p>This is best answered by the actions of the company. Concentrix will do everything as possible</p>

Question	Response
their calls, part of this trust was built as the current NRS provider made sure deaf people were represented in their board and management levels. What will Concentrix do to build this trust?	to provide an excellent service and gain the trust of their users.
Accesshub is described as “Advances in technology have improved the range of accessible services for people who are deaf, hard of hearing and/or have speech impairment”. Can Concentrix change the statement to include deafblind people?	DoCA will provide advice to the forum about changes to identifying deafblind in all relevant public materials in the future. Public materials will be prepared by DoCA not Concentrix.
What is the plan with Accesshub?	Accesshub is a work in progress and will continue to be improved and developed with the guidance and advice from the user community and ACCAN.
Access issues in online application process to NDIS and my age care (Applications can be dropped by the department as they require a voice call in order to start the process, and deaf clients might not be able to answer those calls. If unanswered after 3 attempts the process is cancelled). Can DoCA do anything in this regard?	DoCA can't promise anything at the moment but will bring this to the attention of the relevant contacts.

5. Meeting Conclusion

The committee members thanked both DoCA and Concentrix for providing the opportunity to get more information about the new NRS contract and how it will be delivered.

There was discussion about re-convening another meeting with DoCA, Concentrix and the committee members to identify any additional areas of concern and develop a working relationship to ensure that the transition to the new NRS service is seamless and meets the NRS community's needs.

Action: ACCAN to follow-up with the various stakeholders to organise another meeting.