



Inclusive Communications and the National Disability Strategy

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) believes that access to information and communication services are an essential tool for all people with disability to be able to participate to the fullest extent possible in Australian society.

Articles 9 and 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability articulate the role of communications in making sure that people with disability enjoy human rights, freedoms and respect like other people.

In 2010 information and communication technologies are an integral part of our lives. This trend will continue. As a 10-year blueprint for Governments, the National Disability Strategy needs to incorporate an overarching commitment to inclusive communications and information technologies.

We call for the National Disability Strategy to adopt the following high level principle;

- Acknowledge that affordable access to communication services and information technologies enables economic participation and promotes inclusive communities as well as assisting people to live independently.

ACCAN calls for the National Disability Strategy to commit to the following areas for action:

1. Improve access to preferred information and communication equipment that will enable people with disability to access voice, voice-equivalent or text-to-speech telephony services and the internet and National Broadband Network;

People with disability need to have the right equipment to make a call or browse the internet.

ACCAN is calling for higher awareness and provision of accessible equipment options to be made more readily available for people with disability.

2. Improve available, affordable and accessible communications services for people who are Deaf, or have a speech or hearing impairment to reflect new digital technologies available via the internet and provide access to emergency services via these service channels;

The announcement of the 2010 National Relay Service review is a positive first step in progressing the accessibility options for Australians with disability. A clear commitment in the National Disability Strategy to adopting new digital technologies can provide a National Relay Service which encompasses the principles of Universal Design; offering Australians with hearing or speech-impairment the dignity and choice to communicate in their preferred format.



3. Ensure all levels of government and publicly funded service providers deliver best practice in the accessibility of electronic, print, web and audio-visual communications;

The commitment to implement WCAG 2.0 is a great first step but expanding obligations to include publicly funded service providers will greatly increase the numbers of accessible websites and therefore increase social inclusion.

4. Promote universal design of information and communication equipment by incorporating accessibility criteria in all government procurement policies and publicly funded service provider contracts;

ACCAN sees the opportunity provided by the National Disability Strategy as a way for the Federal, State and Territory Governments to lead the way in supporting the economic participation and social inclusion of Australians with disability by adopting the successful models of public procurement policies that have been incorporated in the European Union and the United States marketplaces. Through the power of these government economies mainstream products and services are increasingly being developed incorporating the principles of Universal Design.

5. Ensure people with disability have affordable and accessible internet, voice and government services delivered via the National Broadband Network;

ACCAN sees the National Disability Strategy providing the opportunity to move forward in the expansion of the Universal Services Obligation: expanding it's scope to encompass the current standards of mobile telephony, providing Australians with disability access to the essential equipment and services they need to interact in the ever expanding information and communications technologies that are part of the Australian social economy.

6. Implement a transition plan to provide for universal audio description and captioned DVDs, Cinema, Online and television broadcast services of high quality, enforced by the Australian Communications and Media Authority

As a whole of government initiative, ACCAN's expectation is that the National Disability Strategy will empower all regulatory bodies to ensure that all retail DVDs, Cinema, Online broadcasts and television broadcasts be required to comply with accessibility requirements outlined in the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) when providing goods and services to the Australian public.

These recommended action items need to be supported by robust performance indicators. ACCAN therefore encourages the National Disability Strategy to adopt the following performance indicators to support these actions:

- Increase in the proportion of people with a disability regularly using the internet;

By way of annual State and Territory statistical analysis, ACCAN anticipates that the National Disability Strategy should see at minimum, equal internet usage across both the disabled and non-disabled population.

- Increase in the proportion of people with a disability having their preferred accessible telephone service in their home and at their place of work; and
- Increase in the proportion of DVDs, Cinema, Online and television broadcasts with captioned and audio description services.



ACCAN is committed to the principle of full accessibility services in the DVD, Cinema, Online and television broadcasting industries. The National Disability Strategy offers the opportunity to require all these industries to provide accessible services of captioning and audio description, reaching annual pre-determined levels of compliance as determined through consultation with the disability sector.

We believe that these recommended actions will meet the stated aspirations of the National Disability Strategy and will put Australia on a path towards a truly inclusive community.

Allan Asher

Chief Executive Officer

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