

Sophie Dunstone
A/g Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on
Environment and Communications
By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Improved Access to Television Services) Bill 2012 [Provisions]

COTA Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry.

COTA Australia ('COTA') is the national policy arm of the eight State and Territory COTAs. Around Australia COTAs have a combined individual membership of around 40,000 older people as well as over 1,000 member organisations with a combined membership in excess of 500,000.

COTA Australia has a focus on national policy issues from the perspective of older people as citizens and consumers and seeks to promote, improve and protect the circumstances and wellbeing of older people in Australia.

For many older people television is an important source of entertainment and a way of keeping in touch with what is going on in the world. It helps to reduce social isolation and can be a useful medium for conveying educational information and emergency warnings. COTA has noted that there is a growing digital divide with older people on the wrong side of such a divide. To some extent television helps bridge that divide as it is easy to use and most households have access to a television. For this reason we want to ensure it is truly accessible for everybody.

Over half of the population aged between 60 and 70 has a hearing loss and this increases to over 70 per cent of those over 70 and 80 per cent of those over the age of 80.¹ This compares with the national average of about 1 in 6 people having a hearing loss. Given that the population is ageing the number of people with hearing loss is going to increase substantially in the future.

Not all older people with a hearing loss use a hearing aid and so rely on captioning if they want to watch television. Some of those who do have a hearing aid find the aids not all that helpful when watching television. Captioning is obviously critical for this group if they are to access something which the rest of the population take for granted.

COTA welcomes all of the provisions in this Bill as they represent a significant step forward in removing a barrier and giving people with a hearing loss more opportunity to enjoy full citizenship.

¹ Australian Hearing *Hearing loss in Australia, It's more common than you think* at www.hearing.com.au/upload/media-room/Hearing loss in Australia

The move to require broadcasters to transmit emergency warnings in text and speech and if possible caption such warning is particularly welcome. COTA is concerned about how older people living in the community fare during emergencies such as bush fires and floods and see improving their access to warnings as a critical part of improving their safety in such situations. Older people are less likely to access technology such as mobile phones and the internet which can be used for warnings systems and so rely on television. If the message is not in text or not captioned they may either miss it completely or misunderstand and so not take the appropriate action.

COTA is also pleased to see that the Bill includes compliance reporting and requires ACMA to undertake a review of the implementation of the improved system. We would like any such review process to be transparent and involve public consultations with the users of captioning to see if it does indeed meet their needs. We also believe that the outcomes of such a review should be made public.

For any further information please contact Jo Root, on 0262823436 or jroot@cota.org.au.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Executive