

Submission No 68

RECEIVED SM
12 MAR 2009

BY: L.A.C.A.

DRAFT DISABILITY (ACCESS TO PREMISES – BUILDING STANDARDS)

Deaf Services Australia

Deaf Children Australia

Deaf Services Queensland

WA Deaf Society

12 March 2009

Deaf Services Australia strongly believes that the Standards for Access to Premises must focus on and incorporate the vital area of 'Social Inclusion' – ensuring that people with a disability are able to achieve equality of participation and access to services just as their hearing peers do.

Deaf and hard of hearing children and adults currently face a wide range of barriers to meaningful social participation and access to information and services. These barriers place this marginalised group at an increased risk of social disengagement from family, peers, community, education/training and the workforce. In the long term this can have a significant impact on their social and mental wellbeing.

The focus of Access to Premises should be on developing a 'social model' which looks beyond the needs of an individual's disability and facilitates the opportunity for positive learning experiences for everyone. This model would focus on the reduction and removal of barriers to social participation and access - these barriers can be attitudinal, environmental, legislative and social.

The social inclusion agenda and the recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights Government's obligation to ensure that ALL people, including Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing people are able to participate in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community.

In a recent report by Access Economics, it estimated that 1 in 6 Australians are currently affected by hearing loss and that by 2050 this statistic will increase to 1 in 4. The same report, highlights that hearing loss is the second most prevalent national health issue, yet it remains the 8th national funding priority. (Access Economics Report- Listen Hear! February 2006). Furthermore it is widely documented that as many as 1 in 5 Australians will experience a mental illness at some time in their life. Combined, these statistics highlight the urgent need to effectively address the mental wellbeing of deaf and hard of hearing people through socially inclusive practices

The Premises Standards are an important part of the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda. These standards will help ensure that people with disability have improved access to wide range of public buildings.

The social inclusion needs of the Australian deaf and hard of hearing population requires a holistic approach involving all public, social and workplace facilities to ensure genuinely inclusive and interactive participation. This would include but is not limited to:

- **Situations requiring hearing augmentation in high traffic and noisy environments** – many people with a mild hearing loss can find communication through a PA system difficult, especially in outdoor environments (e.g. stadium, train stations), and some sections have loops which may be appropriate only for a few.

- **Situations requiring visual/ textual display** – information is not accessible by deaf and hard of hearing people who do not use hearing aids, whilst audio communication cannot be relied on in high traffic and noisy public environments.(e.g. public transportation stations, airport, and security barriers).
- **Situations requiring visual alert systems** – all public and multiple dwelling facilities that are accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people should be required to provide a visual warning/alert system for emergency situations such as fires, bomb threats.
- **Situations requiring security systems/ or use of lifts** – facilities that have security intercom systems and public lifts must include a visual communication medium for deaf and hard of hearing people to access the building or in the case of a faulty elevator..
- **Situations where information is conveyed visually** – where public and workplace environments provide information access to the public through a visual medium such as screens or televisions as part of building fixtures – this communication must be captioned; these facilities include cinemas, hotels, art galleries, museums, retail outlets and shopping centres where televisions are being utilised as a way of explanation.

In addition, as part of the Standards for Access to Premises we strongly support an “auditing” process that ensures compliance at all public and workplace facilities accommodating the communication and access requirements of deaf and hard of hearing people.

We understand that Deafness Forum has provided a detailed submission on the matter of Access to Premises. Deaf Services Australia which comprises Deaf Children Australia, Deaf Services Queensland and the WA Deaf Society, supports Deafness Forum’s submission.

In conclusion, it is essential that we achieve greater accessibility for everyone to ALL public buildings. This initiative will benefit all users by enabling them to effectively access these facilities including their emergency egress and visual communication.

About Deaf Services Australia:

Deaf Services Australia is a national service organisation representing Deaf Children Australia, Deaf Services Queensland and the WA Deaf Society. It’s mission is; A Life to be Lived – deaf people empowered, connected and achieving

Deaf Services Australia’s purpose is to facilitate the liveability and life-abilities of deaf and hard of hearing people through all life stages. We achieve this through:

- Advocating at a local, state and national level for policy change
- Contributing to the policy and legislation development process;

- Responding the needs of deaf and hard of hearing children and adults through the provision of information, programs and services;
- Creating greater awareness and understanding of deafness across all stakeholders and consumers groups.

We appreciate the opportunity to present our thoughts on the issue of Access to Premise, welcome any questions regarding our submission and look forward to feedback on this matter.