
Submission No 13

RECEIVED
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BY: LACA

Hello All,

There's a photo of me, attached, and as you'll see, I use a wheelchair. I have for many years.

As an Australian with disabilities, I object to working full time, paying taxes until I scream and only being facilitated by my government/s to live 2/3rds of a lifestyle in Australia .

No other sector of the community is asked to do that, why am I expected to?

The Prime Minister has said "sorry" to the Aboriginals. When is he going to apologise to me for expecting me to pay full taxes and only be enabled to live a portion of a life because no Australian government has managed, in the last 25 years, to write policies and laws that address our access needs?

It would seem that I am a member of several "stolen generations" too.

My letter to you addresses the constant need - and the unfairness of that need - for me to undertake disability access awareness work each and every time I go out - where ever we go.

1. Disability access laws are not translating into useability within our communities.
2. I will share my observations of "lack of access in the field" with you to demonstrate my point.
3. In closing I will make suggestions as to how this situation might be improved.

1. There is an attitude problem to the whole subject of disability access in Australia. In short, disability access, egress and useability are NOT taken seriously by **any** level of government in this country.

Even within the language ~

Many high profile polities are still saying things like "disabled people" in speeches and in

print. And so does our media. Constantly. It's *disgusting*, yet so widespread it *seems* to be acceptable.

The need for disability access is not understood or taken seriously by the general populace and, in my experience, it inexcusably and frequently remains unaddressed by those "highly paid professionals" who sign off on buildings.

The meagre "laws" (recommendations) covering equitable access that we *do have* are not being implemented and their translation leaves "we who need to use the outcomes" **endlessly waiting** for useable change to occur at policy level.

That is, in many situations we encounter one or more of the following access issues:

- missing, (didn't provide it)
- lacking, (provided it but its too steep or too narrow to be useable)
- is **unusable** in a practical sense (there's a step up onto the ramp)
- and/or
- just wasn't provided in the first place (no disability checkout or ability to move chair around), no curb cuts etc.

I'm referring to

- the parking in order to get into a premises
- the ramped access into the premises
- useability within the premises

2. To demonstrate my point, I'll use the *brand new Fishers IGA in Miners Rest, Vic.*

There are two disability parking bays in the car park. There are ramps put in but the curb cuts are unusable once the car is parked in the bays. There is nowhere to put the trolleys, so most people leave them in the disability parking bay. The parking bays are not policed to keep them available to PWD's.

There's a nice big, easily accessible, useable-gradient ramped access into the store. But there is no access OUT of the store once a person in a chair is **in** the store. Someone has to come and trigger the "gate/boom" to allow one to get OUT of the shop. (This is not equitable, and what if there's a fire?)

And THAT is because there are 4 checkout isles provided, but none of these is wide enough to provide disability access. Nor is there signage for same.

The store had been operating for six months before I came along and told them what the problem was. The manager was so surprised, but told me it would take some time to fix! Of course if and when they do fix it, it will be a retrofit at 10 times the cost of having put in correctly in the first place.

WHO signed off on this building? As they have made a right mess of it, what penalty or damage to their "professional title" do they have to pay for that mistake?

The answer is, none. But I do. I pay the penalty for their mistakes each time I go out. And I keep paying, in more ways than one.

Sadly, this is not an isolated incidence.

I know that other countries have managed to get it right. They have made and implemented and policed laws and they give tax breaks to those who willingly put useable disability access into new plans. I was told at one conference that Canada asked for our model so they knew how NOT to do theirs – what the pitfalls were - and then it took them six months to have theirs up and running. Isn't that sad for us?

3. There could be immediate improvements made to this situation by

1. Implementing real laws with real teeth that let Australians know that it's NOT ok to treat its populace with disabilities like this. We are an aging population and its going to be interesting to see if real change comes when the disability numbers increase significantly.
2. Making those who translate the recommendations governing disability access much more aware and then seriously accountable. Give them a reason to make it their business to be aware. Police these laws. Fine these people who sign off on jobs when the disability factor is not up to par.
3. Give *serious* fines to people who park out the few disability bays. Stop doctors from issuing disability parking permits to everyone and anyone! Make disability permits only usable by those who *have* the disability, not everyone in the family or everyone in the office.
4. Start a long-term and realistic media campaign engaging a diverse range of people with disabilities and talk about the language surrounding disability. In the past this has been attempted and we see a few people with downs syndrome being warm and fuzzy on our TV every now and then. Well, not all people with disabilities have mental issues, not all are children and not all are worthy of others' pity. Some of us are *exactly the same as you*, we work full time at meaningful jobs, and pay our taxes, we drive and we go to theatre and eat out...if we can get into and use the venue, that is. But arthritis has largely claimed my mobility. So we need the people we have voted into power to make genuine **laws** that will allow us to live equitably.

In closing... Why is this happening? Because there's no votes in disability.

If I had my way, I would create such a high level of awareness about the needs of people with disability, and our rights within our communities of Australia that the general populace would take up the issues and would *not put up with this present and ongoing situation.*

I would galvanise the population and draw together the people with disabilities, those who support them, those who earn their living out of them... and then we'd see who's playing the numbers game then.

I would aim to make disability the new thing to be aware of and to talk about. (It has worked against smoking, hasn't it? And its working against other forms of discrimination, so why not disability?)

I would let them know what is expected of them, and I would make it highly unfashionable to largely ignore the *actual* needs of our most needy populace :-

When I was a kid, we called aboriginals "boongs" and that was the way it was. No one saw any shame in it or meant any harm by it. Can you imagine that happening now? Could you entertain the idea of saying something like that in society today?

Well, I am called "a disabled person" all the time, to my face, and my needs are not understood. I am faced with it in the media on a daily basis and even my local federal pollie had a go!

My ideal government would NOT create a lifestyle in which every time someone who should know better (and is not punished if they do) **stuffs up**, which means that I (and the people just like me ~ those who can afford it the least,) have to go out and continually try to get it **fixed in an effort to live a life.**
How ludicrous.

The primary schools in this country are my most recent cause for concern. Many do not offer disability access. So voting days are a lot of fun for me and I simply don't even

attempt to use them as a community resource. Lets hope my big wooden house doesn't burn down and thats my rallying point!

Now, with all of this infrastructure spending that is going to go on, both after the Victorian fires and the Queensland and NT floods... *and* as the stimulus package unfolds... I am worried sick that the need for useable disability access will once again be ignored and we'll be off on another round of retrofitting, policed by (often ill-informed) people with disabilities, for a few more lifetimes.

Thank you all for your time and attention. I do hope the passion I feel about this subject came through and something is, finally, **done**.

Best wishes and kind regards,
Robyn Perham