

8th November 2006

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Humphrey

Re: Supplementary evidence to Senate Enquiry into the funding and operation of the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement

Thank you for forwarding the proof copy of the Hansard transcript of the evidence as given by the Independent Living Centres Australia (ILCA) on the 5 October 2006.

The following documents some minor changes to wording.

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Senator McLucas enquiring about Government ILCs
The ILC ACT is a service of ACT Health's Aged Care and Rehabilitation Stream. The employees of the ILC ACT are ACT Government Public Servants

In response to the committees request for ILCA to provide additional information related to Assistive Technology (AT), I have included the following comments and attachment.

Funding for Equipment schemes in each State and Territory

The committee asked for a copy to be forwarded of the table of information about AT schemes (includes Aids, Equipment and products) provided by each state as referred to during the presentation. The excel table attached has been updated to include more detail that covers some of the variations existing between states. It is important to be aware when using the information that it may not be accurate for each state and would require verification. Also, given the number of schemes that are currently under review the information may become out of date in the near future.

The table highlights the lack of uniformity between schemes. It does not include information about cross state boundary prescription, presumed ownership of prescribed and modified equipment, transferability of equipment between states and comprehensive listings of the type of equipment that can be prescribed through each scheme.

In addition to these points, the provision of training to enable the individual and in many cases family members to effectively and competently use the equipment needs consideration within the overall scope and planning for each state. This is an essential strategy to address and reduce the reported rates of abandonment of equipment.

Workforce issues

Assessment and prescription of AT is dependent upon the quantity and availability of competently trained health professionals to conduct assessments in response to the projected growing demand. WA is



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experiencing a shortfall in trained Occupational and Physiotherapists and other Health professionals, particularly in rural locations. Workforce planning predicts this issue is likely to worsen. The situation is further complicated by the challenges faced by universities to update their curriculum in line with the rapid advancements in AT that can support and maintain the independence of the individual.

I also wish to bring to your attention to another key stakeholder in the AT debate. ARATA (Australian Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology Association) is a national association whose purpose is to serve as a forum for issues in rehabilitation and assistive technology. Membership of ARATA is open to a wide range of people, including those working with or using AT, as well as individuals who have a general interest in the use of AT for people with disabilities. For some time now, ARATA members have been concerned with the fragmented system by which AT and AT Systems are provided. A recent forum held at the National ARATA conference in October 06 reinforced the currency of the issues listed below and referenced in the ILCA submission:

- Limited and inequitable resources to pay for AT and AT services.
- Lack of trained personnel to assist individuals in their use of AT.
- Lack of information/awareness regarding AT options and benefits.
- A lack of access to AT by people in regional and remote areas.
- Delays in gaining access to AT.
- Lack of coordination among the plethora of programs and systems for distributing AT, including moving within systems or regions.

The ILC and ARATA hold a strong belief that AT programs need to be brought within the framework of a national AT policy. This occurred in the USA through the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Similar legislation in Australia would help overcome the problems inherent in our current fragmented system.

ILCA and ARATA would propose to join with the Federal government in a working party to prepare the ground for the introduction of a new policy structure for assistive technology in Australia. Such a working party would need to consult widely, with those who are involved in the current range of programs and with people with a disability themselves.

Thank you for the opportunity to add further comment to this important issue that has the potential to advance the independence and wellbeing of people with a disability.

Yours sincerely,

Gerri Clay
Chair
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Executive Director ILCWA

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