

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
4 August 2006
Dear Sir,

I wish to make a submission to the inquiry into the funding and operation of the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement.

Australians with a disability form approximately 21% of the population, according to the ABS. They are, however, routinely ignored on the political level, with inadequate levels of funding and a dearth of policy development. Unfortunately, Australia State and Federal disability policy remains steadfastly outdated and, if anything, is moving backwards towards nineteenth century concepts of institutionalisation. Australia's attitude is paternalistic and structured towards demeaning pwd as incapable by labelling them as recipients of care and welfare - negative stereotypes that fail to empower pwd and enable them to manage their own lives in the same way that other Australians take for granted.

Following several years living in the UK, I returned to Australia with a commitment to working with governments at the highest level and people with a disability to lead the development of policies, attitudes and services that recognise the equal rights of pwd and enable pwd to live independently. I provide advice to State and Federal Ministers in my role as a member of the National Disability Advisory Council (which, symptomatically, has shamefully remained dissolved for nine months) and as Chair of the SA Disability Advisory Council. I am also Chair of Arts Access SA, and the member of several other boards, policy development bodies and lobby groups.

Pwd need to be at the centre of policy and need to be central in any policy that affects them. This means pwd must have a far greater role - which also has the benefits of giving pwd more confidence and improving public perceptions of pwd - and control over their own lives.

I wish to submit two documents to the Senate inquiry for their discussion, and to learn how much Australia needs to do to change its paternalistic attitudes and catch up with the rest of the world - and treat its disabled citizens as equal citizens rather than the apartheid discrimination that they currently face every day. The two documents attached "Improving the life chances of disabled people" and "Independent Living: The right to be equal citizens" form the basis of current policy development in the UK, and the ambitious vision for improving the life chances of disabled people so that by 2025 disabled people have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society. This is ambitious, but it must be remembered that the UK is already 20 years ahead of Australia in its treatment of pwd! - and this is a conservative estimate!!

I thank the Senate for accepting my submission to its inquiry. I would also be more than happy to assist the inquiry any further way that I can, and would be very happy to discuss my submission in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Paul Collier

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?