



Blind Citizens Australia

Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing Committee

Access Card - Inquiry Into Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007

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Introduction

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is the peak national advocacy organisation of and for people who are blind or vision impaired. Our mission is to achieve equity and equality by our empowerment, by promoting positive community attitudes, and by striving for high quality and accessible services which meet our needs. As the national advocacy peak body we have over 3000 individual members, branches nationwide and around 13 affiliate organisations that represent the interests of blind or vision impaired Australians.

BCA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee.

1. Information in accessible formats

1.1. All public material relating to the access card, including promotional material, must be made **available in accessible formats** for people who are blind or vision impaired.

BCA can lend its expertise to the Australian Government on accessible formats for the blind or vision impaired community. For some initial information, please refer to BCA's publication: *Getting the Message: Information In Accessible Formats: Who Needs It, And How To Provide It (Second Edition)*. This publication is available online at http://www.bca.org.au/natpol/access_info/ or in hardcopy by calling BCA toll free: 1800 033 660.

2. The access card and personal identification

People who are blind or vision impaired face many barriers in the community, including access to statutory forms of photo identity. Without access to a drivers license, people with a vision impairment are left in a disadvantaged position in the community when undertaking everyday tasks, such as applying for a home loan or passport.

BCA has sought to remedy this situation by establishing the BCA Photo ID Card (BCA ID Card) in 1999. Voluntarily available to full members of the organisation, the BCA ID Card is worth 25 points as determined by the Financial Transactions Reports Act (1988) when opening a bank account or entering into business transactions. The introduction of the BCA Photo ID Card has helped, in part, to close the gap of inequity for people who are blind or vision impaired when accessing forms of personal photo identification.

However, it is BCA's assertion that equality of access to personal identification for people who are blind or vision impaired will never be achieved in real terms until a national statutory form of Photo ID for non-drivers is introduced.

While BCA supports the notion that the access card should not be mandatory or used as a national identity card, we call on the Committee to recommend that the access card be given the same level of points as a passport, birth certificate and drivers license. To do this will greatly assist people who are blind or vision impaired having equal access to primary forms of photo identification in the community.

3. Registration and Application

The following points relate to the registration and application process to obtain the access card as outlined under the Bill in Part 2, Division 2 - Getting registered and Part 3, Division 2 - Getting an access card.

3.1 (a): BCA asserts that the provision for ‘some one else’ to register and apply on another’s behalf means the Department of Human Services (and other associated government agencies relevant to the processes of registration and application) will not undertake the necessary adjustments to ensure people who are blind or vision impaired can register and apply for the card independently. The matter of **independence** is especially pertinent in this situation when considering the highly sensitive nature of the data required when registering and applying for the access card.

3.1 (b): In relation to our concern outlined under 3.1 (a), the requirement of lodging a ‘written application’ prevents people who are blind or vision impaired from independently undertaking the process of registration and application.

In support of these matters outlined above, BCA would like to remind the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee of the Principles outlined in the Commonwealth Disability Strategy (CDS). These principles are:

“Equity: people with disabilities have the right to participate in all aspects of the community including the opportunity to contribute to its social, political, economic and cultural life;

Inclusion: all mainstream Australian Government programs, services and facilities should be available to people with disabilities. The requirements of people with disabilities should be taken into account at all stages in the development and delivery of these programs and services;

Participation: people with disabilities have the right to participate on an equal basis in all decision-making processes that affect their lives;

Access: people with disabilities should have access to information in appropriate formats about the programs and services they use; and

Accountability: all areas of Australian Government organisations should be clearly accountable for the provision of access to their programs, facilities and services for people with disabilities. This includes specifying the outcomes to be achieved, establishing performance indicators and linking reporting on outcomes of the Strategy to mainstream reporting mechanisms”.

Source: Commonwealth Disability Strategy. Accessed online on the 04/03/2007 at

<http://www.facs.gov.au/disability/cds/cds/principles1.htm>

4. Card design for people who are blind or vision impaired

4.1. The access card needs to be distinct in its size, shape, tactile and visual appearance to enable people who are blind or vision impaired to distinguish it from the mass of cards people who are blind or vision impaired use in their daily lives.

However, these specific needs for the blind and vision impaired community should be commonly embedded features applied to all cards. To apply these special needs of the card only to blind or vision impaired recipients will only increase the stigmatisation of the blind and vision impaired community and contravene the CDS and anti-discrimination legislation.

5. Recommendations

5.1. On the basis of the principles outlined in the CDS, BCA recommends to the Committee that all processes involved in the registration and application process for the access card are undertaken in a manner that guarantees the equal and independent participation of people who are blind or vision impaired.

5.2. The access card be given the same level of points as a passport or drivers license.

5.3. The access card be distinct in its size, shape, tactile and visual appearance to enable people who are blind or vision impaired to distinguish it from the mass of cards people who are blind or vision impaired use in their daily lives. These specific needs for the blind and vision impaired community should be commonly embedded features applied to all cards.

Conclusion

People who are blind or vision impaired must not have their independence compromised with any element of the access card process. To ensure this happens, the principles of the CDS must be maintained from beginning to end in all procedures related to the card, including application, registration, the issuing process and promotion. By undertaking these principles, the government will ensure the blind and vision impaired community have the same level of utility and usability of the card as the rest of the Australian population.

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