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PWD ACT is supported by the ACT Government
Community Services Directorate through Disability ACT

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ACT Chief Minister and Treasury

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Submission to 2018-19 ACT Budget

People With Disabilities ACT acknowledges the traditional owners of the ACT and pays respects to them and their cultures, and to their elders past and present.

PWD ACT acknowledges the financial support of the ACT Government through the Office of Disability.

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About PWD ACT

People With Disabilities ACT Inc. (PWD ACT Inc.) is a not for profit consumer run systemic advocacy organisation which represents the interests of people with disabilities in the ACT. PWD ACT Inc. works to improve access to all amenities and to all forms of information and activities of the community.

PWD ACT Inc. is a peak body which seeks to inform the community about disability issues. PWD ACT advocates from a human rights perspective and acknowledges the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

PWD ACT has informed its individual and organisational members of this consultation in its e-Bulletins to members during the consultation period and informed members of its intention to make a submission to this consultation.

Priorities

PWD ACT puts forward THREE priority areas for the 2018-19 Budget. Our priorities respond to:

- the needs of people with disability;
- the implementation of commitments made during the 2016 election campaign which are recorded in the parliamentary agreement; and
- the need for underpinning resourcing to sustain systemic disability advocacy in the ACT and enable PWD ACT to be a productive representative voice and partner to government.

PWD ACT's three priorities are:

- Implement action on Universal Housing Design mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement;
- Resource and properly situate the Access Reference Group mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement; and
- Implement the recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services in its report of its Inquiry into the Employment of People with disabilities.

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Priority 1: Implement action on Universal Housing Design mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement

Background

In its election platform PWD ACT asked for mandated housing to the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines, work to invest in and incentivise non-government investors to fund accessible housing construction with a focus on private rental, support for the inclusion of accessible and adaptable housing standards within the Building Code of Australia at the National Level through COAG mechanisms; work to address rental discrimination against people with disability by community education and promotion with private real estate agents and industry through investment in initiatives such as the proposed ACT Housing Strategy; and work to prioritise the rollout of accessible and visitable housing within all new public and social housing developments.

In the Parliamentary agreement the Government has committed to encourage Universal Housing initiatives by: holding a roundtable to develop incentives that will encourage construction of new homes and apartments that meet the Liveable Housing Design Silver and Gold Levels; developing training programs for architects and builders; showcasing Universal Housing in demonstration housing projects; and playing an active role at COAG to push for genuine progress on the 2010 COAG agreement (in the National Disability Strategy), for new housing to meet Universal Design Standards.

Why this is important

There is a shortage of accessible housing for people with disabilities in the open market and in private rental.

There is a double disadvantage – a lack of affordable housing and a lack of built form.

People with disability are more likely to be on low and casualised incomes or on income support and we know from the 2016 Anglicare [Rental Affordability Snapshot](#) that there are only a handful of private rentals in Canberra which can be afforded by someone on the Disability Support Pension.

There is a lack of accessible housing in the ACT which means people have fewer housing choices. An undersupply of visitable housing can also leave people isolated – visiting friends or neighbours can be a challenge. The overheated rental auction market means it's difficult for people with disability to compete, negotiate and identify access modifications.

There will always be a need in the foreseeable future for dedicated public and social housing supply solutions for people with a disability. The [2017 Productivity Commission Report on Government Services](#) follows on from the 2016 report and demonstrates the continuing unmet need of people with disabilities in Canberra for housing which is accessible, visitable and affordable.

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What needs to happen?

PWD ACT welcomed the suite of commitments in the Parliamentary Agreement and agree that they represent a good start and a welcome response to the issues raised by the ACT Disability community. PWD ACT has participated in the ACT Government's consultations on housing and homelessness held during this year. The Housing issues for people with disabilities have been raised and acknowledged at these consultations. However, despite the recognition of our housing issues in the Parliamentary Agreement and various Act government consultations, there has been a lack of progress in the first year of the current Government. The coming second year of this Government needs to be the time of a real push for progress on the housing issues affecting people with disabilities which were specifically included in the Parliamentary agreement which includes funding for these initiatives.

The Government's work on Universal Design must be linked to the Affordable Housing Strategy being designed by the ACT Government. In addition to these commitments we believe that the Government should prohibit further funding which is directed at maintaining or developing institutional living arrangements for people with disability; and initiate a program of action to devolve people with disability from institutions, centre based respite and large group homes in the ACT.

Priority 2: Resource and properly situate the Access Reference Group mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement

Background

In its election platform, PWD ACT asked for a dedicated Access Taskforce – a key coordination point for the planning of disability access in Canberra that was situated within Transport and City Services. It would bring together consumers, planners, architects and policymakers to improve access in older areas and ensure that new development was up to scratch. It would develop a Universal Design charter; identify duplication of effort in work to improve access; provide community education approaches; advise on new market developments and disruption; identify priority areas and blackspots; and identify opportunities to market Canberra as an accessible region.

In the Parliamentary Agreement the Government agreed to establish a resourced Disability Reference Group to include people with disabilities and to address access issues for transport and new developments. However, the Government did not follow through on this commitment in 2017 and instead placed responsibility for access issues with the Disability Reference Group.

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The last 12 months have proved our concerns that the absence of a stand-alone Reference Group on Access issues has resulted in insufficient attention to these issues and a lack of progress towards the Government's own vision for Canberra as a highly liveable city. Suburban, residential, community and transport Developments are proceeding with insufficient oversight on access issues and a resulting risk of access mistakes requiring expensive retrofitting solutions. This is occurring in developments from Light Rail to re-developments of suburban shopping areas. PWD ACT receives at least two requests a month on access issues but lacks the human and financial resources and the specialist expertise to respond appropriately.

Why this is important

Good planning for access also supports sustainable spending and helps to manage a fragile revenue base for the Territory. Canberra is heading for an increase in the ageing population and it is more cost effective and sustainable to plan for this in advance and build access features into development rather than retrofit later.

Bad access has consequences – like older people having falls and winding up in acute care. A set and forget approach with the Disability Standards is not good enough. A range of people are undertaking work to plan, educate, promote, broker and regulate solutions for access and this work may be high quality but it is not always coordinated for maximum effect. For instance, during our consultations we found that the [Access City](#) project funded by the ACT Government to broker access solutions was not cognisant of or utilising [Disability Confidence Canberra](#) which was also funded by the ACT Government and had been developed to make business more responsive to disability access and provide them with the tools to make a change. A joined up approach would enable the disability sector to go into a business precinct with a full gamut of joined up tools and resources. It would mean a complaint about an access issue triggered both a brokerage response and an educative response with the regulatory response offered as a fall-back. This does not happen.

The realisation of the ACT Government's vision for Canberra as a liveable city, and PWD ACT's vision for Canberra as an accessible city, may not always require extra resources – but it does require a harmonised, determined effort with a range of stakeholders pulling in the one direction.

Due to its combination of State and local government functions, Canberra has strengths and weaknesses in planning for disability access. On the one hand we can better coordinate solutions, but on the other hand we lack a source of dedicated consumer-led advice to ensure accessibility in developments, such as might be provided by a local government access committee appointed by a council.

PWD ACT welcomes the Government's commitment to improve transport infrastructure and note the Government has emphasised a mandate for light rail. PWD ACT hopes it will meet and exceed disability access standards across the city. Rail needs to be allied to fully accessible buses; paths of travel to and from the tram stops; improvements to wheelchair taxis; plus a strategy to help disadvantaged people living off trunk routes get where they need to go.

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Accessible transport needs to be linked to good city infrastructure. We're a growing city with an ageing population. Our cityscape remains broken and inaccessible to people with disability - we can't visit friends in their homes, move around the city, get on a bus or find inclusive affordable and accessible housing. We need a mechanism to feed lived disability access subject matter expertise into both built environment and transport investments.

What needs to happen

While the Disability Reference Group provides important advice on the National Disability Strategy and the NDIS transition, it sits within the Community Services Directorate and its remit is too wide to allow a tight focus on access issues within spaces, places and transport services. These require a close focus and a dedicated remit with appropriate expertise in the right place.

Canberra needs a separate access focussed reference group, ideally placed within Transport and City Services, which works on access and transport issues alone and has the people, power and resources to make change.

There is a lack of focussed expertise on disability access in Canberra as the issue does not fall within one organisations remit. There is a need for a focal point of advice to get it right. These are specialised issues which involve working with standards but also making sure that we get consumer expertise so that they work for real people. For instance it's possible to build a parking space and a curb ramp which both comply with the disability standards and yet don't work in tandem. Avoiding these issues requires people with disability to be involved. It requires consumer advice and training.

PWD ACT therefore strongly advocates for a discrete and dedicated point of advice working along the lines of the model structure and terms of reference provided as part of our [2016/17 Budget Submission](#) as part of the ACT Budget Community Consultation Process.

PWD ACT also opposes these issues being loaded onto the existing Reference Group without additional resourcing as this may reduce the capacity of this group to be broadly focused and strategic. The adverse risks of loading access issues on to the proposed Reference Group were outlined in PWD ACT's 2017 budget submission. In this submission, PWD ACT pointed to the risks in having one advisory body responsible for both the NDIS and the NDS as well as the task of ensuring our infrastructure meets the needs of people with disability and ageing Canberrans. The ACT Government needs a focal point for disability policy, primarily to The Office for Disability, and more technical advice on access issues, primarily to Transport and City Services. These are skills held by different people and the levers for change are in different directorates.

PWD ACT notes that the recently released Report of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities includes Recommendation 13:

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3.74 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establishes an access committee, comprising of representatives with disabilities, to provide advice and comment on planning and transport policies.

PWD ACT interprets this recommendation as supporting our call for a targeted and specific purpose Committee on access and planning issues to address access issues in transport and new developments. This Committee needs to be in a Directorate with a line of site to transport and development issues. It needs to include consumers, access consultants, architects, planners and designers. It might also provide advice and support on the Universal Housing Design initiatives mentioned in Priority 1 above.

Priority 3: Implement the recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services in its report of its Inquiry into the Employment of People with disabilities

Background

PWD ACT has for some time noted with concern the declining rates of employment of people with disabilities in the Act Public Service. This decline has occurred despite the ACT Government's launch of a Strategy to promote the employment of people with disabilities in the ACT Public Service in 2011. This was a response to a 2009 Report by PWD ACT 'Making Diversity Work.' PWD ACT has for some time called for the relevant Act Legislative Assembly Standing Committee to conduct an inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities. In response to this call, the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Service conduct an Inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities in April and May 2017. The Committee has released its report and the Committee and the community await the Government's response.

The Committee's Report is a a comprehensive document which includes material and research from both within and outside the ACT. It is a report which empowers the Assembly and the ACT Government to take initiatives to enable people with disabilities to get jobs, keep jobs and advance in their careers. While the inquiry and its report has a focus on the Act Public Service it includes research material and recommendations relating to the employment of people with disabilities in the wider community. The Report has been well accepted by the disability sector as evidenced from a discussion of the Report and its recommendations co-ordinated by PWD Act attended by 25 people and held on 27 October 2017

PWD ACT calls on the Act Government to include in the 2017-2018 Budget funding to implement the Report's recommendations. In particular PWD ACT calls for funding to implement the following inquiry recommendations

Recommendation 2

3.27 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government have a standalone disability employment strategy for the ACT Public Service developed in consultation with people with a disability, the Disability Reference Group and other stakeholders. This Strategy should include:

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- a) *Consideration of any outstanding action items previous strategies, policies and frameworks relating to disability employment in the ACT Public Service.*
- b) *Consideration of the Doing it Differently “ask the person” approach for service interactions with both employees and service users that disclose a disability;*
- c) *A timeline for all ACT Government Directorates to develop Disability Employment Action Plans with clear lines of accountability, monitoring and evaluation;*
- d) *Recognition and support for people with mental illness and/or psychosocial disabilities in the workplace;*
- e) *A timeline for all ACT Government Directorates to appoint a Disability Inclusion Champion and establish a Disability Employee Network; and*
- f) *A timeline for the ACT Government to establish a Practitioner’s Network across all Directorates and Agencies.*

Recommendation 7:

3.68 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider establishing a paid internship program to build professional skills, provided there are links to an employment pathway, for people with a disability, as part of its continuum of disability employment initiatives.

Recommendation 8

3.69 The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT be funded to deliver a paid internship program for people with a disability in the ACT Legislative Assembly, provided that there are links with an employment pathway.

Recommendation 19

4.18 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government identifies certain positions suitable for people with a disability for selective recruitment and placement in all Directorates and across all levels of employment.

Recommendation 21

4.20 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government supports people with a disability through an emerging leaders program to support career development into future senior leadership roles.

Recommendation 31

4.89 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure all staff at the Executive Level 1 or 2 equivalent, and all human resource team members, attend compulsory face-to-face disability awareness training and access to a disability employment toolkit. Training should be co-designed by people with disabilities and include reference to mental illness.

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The inquiry makes 25 other recommendations. PWD ACT calls on the Act Government to designate a lead agency and lead officers within the ACT Public Services to implement the inquiry recommendations in a co-ordinated way across the Act public sector.