



Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

17 May 2017

Dear Sir or Madam:

Re: Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into *Delivery of Outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities*

The First Peoples Disability Network (Australia) (FPDN) is a national organisation representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities and their families. FPDN is a unique organisation not only domestically but also internationally in that it is a nationally constituted cross disability organisation governed by Indigenous people with disabilities. FPDN is widely recognised as the thought leader on disability in Indigenous Australia and as a result has been the focal point for government engagement with regard the creation and consolidation of the National Disability Strategy.

By any measure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities are amongst of the most disadvantaged of all Australians. They often face multiple barriers to their meaningful participation within their own communities and the wider community. One of the most significant of all barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities is access to the built environment.

With regard this submission FPDN provides the following comments related to the following terms of reference:

- a. the planning, design, management, and regulation of:
 - i. the built and natural environment, including commercial premises, housing, public spaces and amenities,
 - ii. transport services and infrastructure, and
 - iii. communication and information systems, including Australian electronic media and the emerging Internet of things;

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities experience discrimination on a regular basis in terms of access to premises and also in terms of access to transport. The negative experience of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities is particularly acute but not exclusive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities living in regional and remote Australia.

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With regard the built environment there remains a very serious lack of accessible housing stock in regional and remote Australia. Regrettably some major Aboriginal housing initiatives have not met access standards or have been developed without any appropriate engagement with experts in disability access and design.

With regard to access to commercial spaces it is a common experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities to be completely excluded in terms of access. In regional and remote Australia and in small Aboriginal communities this can result in Aboriginal people with disabilities having little or no physical access to local shops or grocery stores for example.

With regards access to transport services this is essentially non-existent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities especially for those with physical disability particularly in regional and remote Australia. For more than a decade FPDN has visited regional and remote communities and seen first hand the very serious lack of accessible transport and the consequences such lack of access has in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities accessing an education or employment for instance. Or critically being able to access health services. A stark example of this that FPDN continues to encounter around the country is the extraordinary challenges many Aboriginal people with disability face is being able to access dialysis because of a simple lack of accessible transport available. Dialysis requires multiple visits during any given week and each trip can become a prohibitive cost to the person with disability. In such circumstances Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities are entirely dependent on informal support which can often amount to seeing if they can 'get a ride' with another community member, which will invariably be in a standard vehicle that is not designed to support a person with physical disability. Another major barrier for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability particularly in regional and remote Australia are the distances they are required to travel for education, employment or to access health services or a range of any other relevant supports.

Furthermore some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities have unique travel requirements that are different to the accessible travel needs of most other people with physical disability. For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities they can only travel by propeller plane from their remote communities, but such aeroplanes are not designed to support people with physical disabilities. Or they have to travel by troop carrier for example.

With regard access to communication and information systems, including Australian electronic media many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities and their families simply do not have access to computers or a reliable Internet service. This is seriously problematic especially as many government systems require access to computer to fill in forms for instance. This is particularly acute when it comes to accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which often uses a computer based application process.

We at FPDN make the following recommendations as immediate actions to address barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities:

1. Support the *Whole of Community Response to Disability* approach that is recommended by FPDN in addressing unmet need. The *Whole of Community Response to Disability* builds upon the well-established approach to meeting the needs of people with disability in developing in countries, which is referred to as Community Based Rehabilitation. It is a relatively simple approach to addressing unmet need that involves mapping the community to ascertain what resources may be available and what may be required to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities. From there community leaders are identified who are tasked with seeking out the various resources that may be required to

support their community members with disabilities. The resources can range from physical resources to accessing training to enrolling the help of external experts.

2. Invest in access infrastructure. It would be significantly more cost effective for example to invest in a fleet of accessible vans in remote Australia and train up local community members to become drivers which in turn creates employment, then to continue with what is at best an ad hoc approach to transport.
3. Invest in opportunities to improve physical access within communities, i.e. jobs creation for people to build and maintain footpaths for example or jobs for housing modifications.
4. Where access to computers and Internet are a problem enable flexible alternative approaches to accessing various government systems.

FPDN would welcome the opportunity to present further evidence in person at a hearing of the committee.

Yours sincerely

Damian Griffis
Chief Executive Officer