

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Update Report November/December 2005 & January 2006

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the peak organisation for women with all types of disabilities in Australia. It is a not-for-profit organisation constituted and driven by women with disabilities. It is the only organisation of its kind in Australia and one of only a very small number internationally. WWDA is inclusive and does not discriminate against any disability. WWDA is unique, in that it operates as a national disability organisation; a national women's organisation; and a national human rights organisation (more information about WWDA can be found at the organisation's extensive website: www.wwda.org.au). Please find below a brief Update Report from WWDA for the months of November & December 2005, and January 2006. If you have any questions, or would like more information on anything in this report, please email Carolyn or Angela at: wwda@ozemail.com.au.

Contents:

1. WWDA Management Committee & Staff 2005 - 2006
 2. WWDA Submission to the Draft UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities
 3. Welfare-to-Work Reforms & Industrial Relations - Update
 4. New WWDA Project - Advancement through Advocacy for Women With Disabilities
 5. WWDA Funding Submissions – Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Funding (Australian Government) & General Purpose Funding (Global Fund for Women)
 6. WWDA Endorses the Australian NGO Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
 7. Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) National Meeting on 'Improving the Availability of Adjustable Examination Couches in General Practices throughout Australia'
 8. WomenSpeak Conference Sydney (11-12 November 2005)
 9. Mobility International USA Third International Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD 2006)
 10. WWDA Telecommunications Working Party - Update
 11. Women With Disabilities Australian Capital Territory (WWDACT) – Inclusion Innovators
 12. News from Other Organisations
 13. Review of the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP)
 14. New on the WWDA Website
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1. WWDA Management Committee & Staff 2005 - 2006



Annie Parkinson – President

Annie Parkinson, a long-standing member of WWDA, and WWDA's Vice-President for 2003-04, has over 30 years experience in activism in the women's movement, and the gay and lesbian rights movement. She was involved in the development of the ground-breaking publication 'I Always Wanted to be a Tapdancer', a book of stories of women with disabilities published in the late eighties. She has worked as a research assistant in the disability field, and in the 1990s, co-founded an organisation called Access Plus, a group that addressed issues which particularly affected queers with disabilities. She has been actively involved in the establishment and management of several organisations, and has been a member of a number of management committees. Annie has most recently joined the management committee of a small SAAP funded housing organisation which offers short-to-medium term housing for women who have experienced sexual abuse.



Sue Salthouse – Vice President

Sue Salthouse has worked in the area of social justice since 1996, playing an active role in systemic advocacy for women with disabilities. Sue runs her own Consultancy company which specializes in a range of work in the disability sector – social research, government and non government policy advisor, conference facilitation, project development and management, TAFE teaching, and individual advocacy. Sue is a research and policy consultant to WWDA, coordinator of WWDA’s Telecommunications Working Group, and WWDA spokesperson on Industrial Relations and Employment. She has also undertaken a number of research and advocacy projects for WWDA covering a wide range of issues of concern to disabled women. Sue is a representative for WWDA and as a WWDA-affiliate, for the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, on a wide range of Advisory Groups. She regularly presents papers for WWDA at Conferences and other forums. Sue also convenes Women With Disabilities ACT (a WWDA-affiliate organisation).



Helen Meekosha

Helen Meekosha is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, University of New South Wales, Australia. She worked as a community development worker for 17 years in the UK and Australia prior to her appointment at UNSW. Her research interests cross boundaries of race, ethnicity, disability and gender. In 1996 she was instrumental in establishing The Social Relations of Disability Research Network, a group of interdisciplinary scholars interested in Disability Studies. Later she went on to be a founding member of the Disability Studies and Research Institute (DsaRI). Helen has written and spoken extensively, from a feminist and a disability perspective on citizenship, human rights, social movements, the media and the body, communications and multiculturalism. Active in the disability movement for 20 years, she has been involved with Women with Disabilities Australia since its inception over a decade ago and as President in 2001 accepted the Australian Human Rights Award in the community category. She is an Overseas Consultative Editor of Disability and Society, on the JORSEN International Advisory, a member of the International Advisory Editorial Board of the Encyclopaedia of Disability 2006 (Sage), and an editor of Volume 4. In June 2005 she was the Noted Scholar in feminist disability studies at the University of British Columbia.



Kate List - Secretary

Kate has a keen interest in disability policy and is an enthusiastic campaigner for the rights of women with disabilities. Kate has worked as a Policy & Research Officer for WWDA and has also worked in disability policy with the Commonwealth Government. As a qualified scientist, Kate has also worked at the Australian Museum and taught at the Australian Defence Force. Kate has undertaken a number of representative roles on behalf of WWDA including being the WWDA rep on the Board of the Australian Disability Studies and Research Institute (DSARI).



Pamela Menere - Treasurer

Pamela lives in Corryong in North East Victoria and has been involved with WWDA for many years, having held positions of Secretary and Treasurer of the Management Committee. Pamela has been involved with several advocacy and disability related groups including the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network, Towong Shire Community Access Committee and the Hume Region DHS Disability Advisory Committee. She is also actively involved with numerous other community organisations in her local area. Pamela has worked in part time paid employment as an outreach employment counsellor with a disability employment agency.



Lina Pane

Lina has extensive experience in working as a social worker in the disability field and is well known as a feminist disabled writer and keynote speaker. Her professional career has included carer support; service development in the areas of women's health programs, women's employment services, mentoring and peer support programs, and life coaching. Lina has her own Consultancy company which specializes in community development work, social work, and research particularly in the disability field. Lina has particular interest and experience in stress management for women and the study of psychotherapy, mind mastery and relaxation techniques.



Jill Fowler

Jill Fowler has extensive experience in the disability sector and is a passionate advocate for the rights of women with disabilities. Jill is a part of the successful Consultancy Firm, H C Harrison Consultants, which provides the general public, businesses and all levels of government with advice about how to provide equitable access within and around the built environment as well as staff development in the area of Disability Awareness. Jill has worked across the Disability, Recreation, Carer and Advocacy sectors for 15 years. She has had extensive involvement in both access and service delivery issues including: representation on many boards of management, committees and consultative groups.



Sheila King

Sheila King has a long history of advocacy for people with disabilities. She is the Secretary and founding member of Access For All Alliance, a volunteer community group established to ensure equitable and dignified access to all premises and facilities whether public or private, to all members of the community. In November 2003 Sheila received an Annual Peer Award from the Physical Disability Council of Australia for her efforts in addressing the issue of access to health professionals across Australia. This took the form of a study into the lack of adjustable height examination beds in doctor's surgeries throughout Australia. Sheila serves on a number of Committees and undertakes a wide range of representative work in the disability sector.

Watch this space!

Vicki Alipasinopoulos

Vicki Alipasinopoulos has been a member of WWDA since 1999. Vicki's background is in social work and she also holds a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. Vicki has been an active member of the disability sector and attended the first Leadership and Mentoring Workshop run by WWDA in 1999. Vicki currently serves on a number of committees in the disability sector, including the Management Committees of the Disability Resources Centre and Blind Citizens Australia. Vicki is also currently serving on a consumer feedback committee as part of the newly formed blindness agency, Vision Australia. This Committee provides feedback to staff to the Training, Technology and Employment team in Victoria. Vicki participates in voluntary work at various agencies where she provides counselling to clients who have an intellectual/psychiatric illness. Other voluntary work involves providing emergency relief, information, referral, advocacy and support.



Jo Dixon

Jo Dixon has a keen interest in human rights, disability and gender issues. She is currently undertaking a Bachelor of Laws Degree at Latrobe University in Victoria. Jo is very active in student advocacy within the University, and is the current Disability Liaison Officer where she actively promotes the needs and rights of students with disabilities. She is also the student representative on the La Trobe University Disability Advisory Committee. Jo is an active community volunteer and has undertaken voluntary work in the areas of asylum seekers and refugees; aboriginal legal aid; youth support services and domestic violence support services.

WWDA Staff



Carolyn Frohmader – Executive Director



Angela Court – Business Manager

2. WWDA Submission to the Draft UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities

In November 2001, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly established an Ad Hoc Committee (AHC) to "consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral convention on the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities." This action came after many years of advocacy by the disability community for the inclusion of disability in the UN human rights legal framework. The AHC has met a number of times since then, and meets again in January 2006 to focus specifically on the most recent draft of the convention developed by the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee, Ambassador Don McKay in October 2005. This draft is known as the Chair's Text. The Chair's Text is an amalgamation of the proposals and debates that have taken place in the Ad Hoc Committee in 2005.

As explained by Ambassador Don McKay in his covering letter to the Chair's Text, although there has been general agreement that disabled women are at a particular disadvantage and their situation needs to be appropriately covered by the Convention, there is no consensus as to how that will be achieved; ie: whether there needs to be a separate Article dealing with women with disabilities, or whether this could be covered in other parts of the draft convention. This fundamental issue needs to be resolved at the next Ad Hoc Committee meeting in January 2006.

In late November 2005, Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) provided a written submission to the Commonwealth Government's (through the Department of Family and Community Services and the Attorney Generals Department) request for comments on the 'Chairman's Text for a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities'. Due to the short time frame, WWDA's submission was necessarily brief and focused explicitly on provisional Article 6 - *Women With Disabilities*.

Despite the position of disabled women in Australia, the Australian Government decided at the last Ad Hoc meeting, that it would not support an Interpretive article on women with disability in the Comprehensive and Integral International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) does not support the Australian Government's position on this issue.

WWDA's Submission strongly recommends that the Australian Government heed and represent the views and aspirations of disabled women in Australia by supporting the inclusion of an Interpretive Article on Women With Disabilities in the Comprehensive and Integral International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

A copy of WWDA's Submission to the Australian Government on the on the '*Chairman's Text for a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities*' is now available on WWDA's website.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/unconvsub3.htm>

If anyone would like a copy of the Submission emailed to them, please contact the WWDA Office via email on: wwda@ozemail.com.au

3. Welfare-to-Work Reforms & Industrial Relations - Update

3.1. Third Press Conference at Parliament House

On Thursday 3 November, Sue Salthouse (WWDA Spokesperson on Welfare Reform) participated in a third press conference at Parliament House (Canberra). On this occasion it was to launch a 3rd Report from National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), engaged by the National Foundation for Australian Women on behalf of the What Women Want consortium. In this Report NATSEM examined the effect which small changes in the withdrawal of NewStart Allowance (NSA) as people started earning income would have on the Effective Marginal Tax Rates (EMTRs) paid, and the consequent positive affect this would have on take-home pay. The modelling demonstrated that for relatively small changes, and limited increase in overall cost to Government, the potential financial hardship which could be experienced under NSA could be alleviated to some degree.

3.2. The Second ‘What Women’ Want Forum

The consortium of more than 60 women’s organisations (auspiced by the Australian Women’s Coalition, Security4Women and WomenSpeak), convened a second *What Women Want* Forum on 11 November 2005. It was timed to reiterate our concerns about the proposed Work Choices and Welfare to Work just prior to the tabling of legislation in Parliament. WWDA contributed a background paper ‘*Women with Disabilities – Still At A Loss*’ and Sue Salthouse participated as a panelist in the discussion which followed presentations from the keynote speakers. Copies of the ‘*Women with Disabilities – Still At A Loss*’ paper are available from the WWDA website (go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/w2wnov05.htm>). Copies can also be obtained by contacting the WWDA Office. Media coverage of the forum meant that women’s viewpoint was in the public arena to coincide with the tabling of the legislation.

3.3. Radio Interview

The intense work being done to reach all people with disabilities and keep them informed of the potential negative impact on large numbers of people with disabilities of proposed Welfare to Work and Work Choices legislation continued during November. There was wide dissemination of the Research Reports generated by NATSEM in the disability community. Sue Salthouse was interviewed by Radio RPH based in Brisbane on the NATSEM Reports and details of the proposed legislation. The half hour interview was played on community radio in both Brisbane and Sydney.

3.4. WWDA Submission to Senate Inquiry

As a result of the intense lobbying from community groups and disability organisations, a Senate Inquiry was convened at the time of the tabling of the *Welfare to Work Legislation* in Parliament. The Inquiry was conducted by the Senate Community Affairs Legislative Committee to receive submissions on ‘*Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005; Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005*’. As expected, the time frame for making submissions was extremely short. Nevertheless 62 submissions were made.

WWDA’s submission called for the government to make a number of changes which (in summary) WWDA believes would have enabled more meaningful educational opportunities to be taken up by women with disabilities on the NewStart Allowance (NSA); have enabled assessment of work capability to be more in line with that currently applying to women on the Disability Support Pension (DSP); have made some adjustments to reduce the Effective Marginal Tax Rates (EMTRs) which will reduce take-home pay to ridiculously low levels once income earned reaches the \$200 mark; and for a radical review of the distances job seekers with disabilities will be required to travel to a work place.

It is worth noting that all Senators, across all parties, referred to the findings of the NATSEM Reports relevant to the impact of the proposed changes on single parents (Report #1) and on people with disabilities (Report #2) on many occasions during the course of the hearings.

The WWDA Submission to the Senate Inquiry is available on the WWDA website.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/w2wsen.htm>

Copies can also be obtained by contacting the WWDA Office.

3.5. Witness to Senate Inquiry

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) was invited to appear before the Senate Inquiry into the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other Measures) Bill 2005 and the Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005 on the second day of hearings on Tuesday 22 November 2005 in which witnesses were predominantly individuals with disabilities or representatives of organisations of people with disabilities. The preceding day had been devoted to appearances of delegates from welfare and social organisations. Sue Salthouse accompanied Colette O’Neill (AFDO) as a part of the two-member AFDO delegation. Sue and Collette appeared with Alanna Clohessy and Heidi Forrest from People With Disabilities Australia (PWDA). The general consensus of witnesses was that few of the specific argued-for concessions were heeded. Nevertheless, the Recommendations did encourage periodic examination of the interface between further education, welfare and the needs of a changing labour market; encouraged collection of appropriate data for meaningful review of the impact of the Welfare to Work package; and for the setting up guidelines such that their interpretation could be made subjectively and appropriately.

The Hansard transcript of the day's proceedings is available on application to WWDA.

The Committee report (28 November 2005) is available from the Parliament House website.
Go to: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/welfare_to_work/report/index.htm.

3.6. Further Action

WWDA continues to work with the *What Women Want* consortium of women's organisations which are in the process of examining ways in which the impacts of the implementation of the two-pronged changes to the work environment can be effectively monitored.

4. New WWDA Project - Advancement through Advocacy for Women With Disabilities

Early in 2005, WWDA submitted an Application for funding to the Commonwealth Office for the Status of Women (now known as the Office for Women within the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services). WWDA's Application to the OSW Women's Development and Leadership Programme (Capacity Building Grants) was to conduct a Project entitled '*Advancement through Advocacy for Women With Disabilities*'. In early January 2006, WWDA was notified by the Minister for Family & Community Services (Senator Kay Patterson) that our Application had been successful. WWDA will receive \$25,000 over 12 months to conduct the Project.

Women with disabilities continue to be one of the most marginalised groups within Australia. They experience discrimination on the grounds of both disability and gender. In order to improve the status of women with disabilities, it is necessary to advocate at a systemic level on their behalf.

Since its inception WWDA has worked extensively in systemic advocacy, and has made substantial gains in recognition of the low status of women. This has resulted in a constant inflow of requests for women with disabilities to fill representative roles on advisory bodies on a wide range of government and non-government bodies. WWDA has a core group of qualified, experienced members who undertake representational and systemic advocacy work. However, the requests and opportunities for representation far exceed WWDA's capacity to provide skilled representatives. In addition, a reasonable proportion of new members express interest in taking an active role in the organisation. WWDA's rapid growth as an organisation has meant in practice that there has been insufficient resources to undertake the necessary capacity building initiatives to support and strengthen the systemic advocacy work of the organisation. WWDA therefore needs to enhance its capacity to recruit and support its representatives, and empower them to take on leadership roles both within WWDA and in the wider community.

The overall aim and long term goal of the project is to improve the status of women with disabilities through systemic advocacy. The major objective of the Project is: 'to enhance WWDA's capacity to promote the participation of women with disabilities in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life.' Specifically, the Project will:

- Develop systems and processes whereby women with disabilities can be identified, trained and recruited to act as advocates to improve the status of women with disabilities;
- Develop the necessary tools to support women with disabilities in their representative and advocacy roles;
- Research and identify representation, leadership and systemic advocacy opportunities for women with disabilities.

WWDA will keep members informed of the progress of the Project through our regular Monthly Update Bulletins and through the WWDA Discussion List (wwda-discuss). A detailed Project Plan will be developed and will be made available to WWDA members and other interested parties.

5. WWDA Funding Submissions – Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Funding (Australian Government) & General Purpose Funding (Global Fund for Women)

In late 2005, the Australian Government (through the Department of Family & Community Services) announced the availability of funding for Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault initiatives. In the 2005-06 Budget the Australian Government allocated \$75.7 million over four years to the Office for Women (Department of Family & Community Services) under the Women's Safety Agenda. The Women's Safety Agenda addresses four broad themes: Prevention; Health; Justice; and Services. The purpose of Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault funding is to address the impact of domestic and family violence and sexual assault through: community-based research; related partnership projects; and/or product development.

WWDA submitted a proposal to the Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault funding program in late December 2005. There is a dearth of information and educational resources about domestic violence which are accessible to women with disabilities. Through its diverse and broad membership, WWDA has identified an urgent need to undertake this Project, which will focus on the development and production of a *Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities*. This Manual will be developed in alternative formats in order to ensure accessibility for all women with disabilities, and will be developed in consultation with the members of WWDA and other key stakeholders. WWDA's proposal has been developed in response to the expressed needs of women with disabilities in Australia, and the lack of information that is available to this group. The Project will be national in scope and has international applicability.

It is anticipated that successful applicants will be announced in February 2006. WWDA will keep members updated on the outcome.

The Global Fund for Women is a grant-making organization supporting women's human rights organizations around the world working to address critical issues such as gaining independence, increasing girls access to education, and stopping violence against women. The Global Fund makes grants to seed, strengthen and link women's rights groups based outside the United States working to address human rights issues. The Global Fund for Women is based in San Francisco USA. In January 2006, WWDA submitted an application for funding to the Global Fund for Women to support WWDA's work and assist with the capacity building initiatives of our organization. It can take between 6-12 months for Applications to be considered, so we will keep members informed of the progress.

6. WWDA Endorses the Australian NGO Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. CEDAW was ratified by Australia in 1983. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

The Office for Women (Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services) has responsibility for monitoring Australia's obligations under CEDAW, including preparation of Australia's report under the Convention (required every four years) and providing advice on new developments relating to CEDAW. Progress with implementation of the Convention is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women primarily through considering the reports of state parties. Australia's Combined Fourth and Fifth Reports on Implementing the United Nation's Convention Against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ('Women in Australia') has been submitted to the Committee and will be reported on at the thirty-fourth session at United Nations Headquarters in New

York on 30 January 2006. During this session the Committee will provide feedback to the reporting countries recognizing their progress in implementing the Convention's provisions, as well as highlighting concerns and proposing recommendations on how to address challenges in applying the Convention more widely and consistently.

As well as the Australian Government reporting on its implementation of CEDAW, there is also a 'Shadow Report' submitted. This Report entitled '*Australian NGO Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*', brings to the United Nations the voices of over 1000 women in Australia, from more than 60 consultations. The Report is the culmination of a two year project conducted by the Women's Rights Action Network of Australia (WRANA). The NGO Shadow Report identifies seven key areas of concern for women in Australia, including: Violence Against Women; Leadership and Political Participation; Law and Justice; Housing and Utilities; Health; Education; Economic Security and Employment. WWDA participated in the WRANA consultations and provided reference material to inform the research for the Shadow Report.

The Australian NGO Shadow Report contains a number of specific references to the plight of disabled women in Australia and makes explicit recommendations within the seven key areas of concern as they relate to women with disabilities. For example, the Report calls on the CEDAW Committee to '*Assert to the Australian Attorney-Generals that any uniform approach to the sterilisation and reproductive rights of women and girls with disability should prohibit sterilisation of girls with disability under the age of 18 years unless there is a serious threat to life or health, and prohibit sterilisation of women with disability in the absence of informed consent unless there is a serious threat to life or health.*'

In December 2006, WWDA formally endorsed the Australian NGO Shadow Report, along with over 100 other organizations.

A copy of the Australian NGO Shadow Report can be accessed via the WRANA website.

Go to:<http://www.wrana.org.au/>

The Australian Government's Report Combined Fourth and Fifth Reports on Implementing CEDAW 'Women in Australia' is available from the Office for Women (OFW) website.

Go to: http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/international/womens_human_rights/index.htm

Alternatively, if anyone would like a copy of these Reports emailed to them, please contact the WWDA Office at wwda@ozemail.com.au.

7. Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) National Meeting on 'Improving the Availability of Adjustable Examination Couches in General Practices throughout Australia'

In 2003, Sheila King from the Access for All Alliance (and also a member of WWDA's Management Committee) undertook a national survey of the availability of adjustable examination couches by contacting every General Practice in Australia. The survey was prompted by reports received of concerns from people with disabilities about the quality of medical care they were receiving in General Practices. In broad terms, the survey of 3553 General Practices nationally identified 14,0008 fixed height examination couches compared to only 719 adjustable examination couches. (For a more extensive summary of the research, see the Access for All Alliance paper at: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/health/index.htm)

In response to this work by the Access for All Alliance, the Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and the Royal College of General Practitioners (RACGP) have agreed to conduct a national meeting of 'interested parties' to help identify the best ways of ensuring a broad availability of couches. The purpose of the meeting is to focus on a number of questions:

1. What are the factors that limit the availability of adjustable examination couches?
2. What options are there for increasing the availability of adjustable examination couches?
3. What needs to be done, and by who, to ensure patients with disabilities do not experience a lower quality of service as a result of lack of access to adjustable examination couches?

In a letter to the Access for All Alliance (December 2004), the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (on behalf of the Minister for Health, Tony Abbott) stated (in part):

'You may be interested to know that the Government supports the accreditation process for general practice and provides financial incentives for practices to participate, including funding through the Practice Incentives Program (PIP). Practices must be accredited or working towards accreditation against the RACGP Standards for General Practices to participate in the Program. Practices that participate in the PIP receive an annual flagfall payment for joining the Program as well as funding for their participation in a number of other initiatives. In 2003-04, practices received a total of \$40million or around \$8,600 per practice for this component. This is effectively a payment for undertaking the accreditation process. Part of the purpose of this payment is to offset costs that practices incur in becoming accredited, including practice equipment costs. This recognizes that disincentives to become accredited should be minimized where possible.'

The meeting will take place on February 15 2006 at HREOC in Sydney. Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) will be represented at the meeting by Helen Meekosha; Sheila King and Annie Parkinson. WWDA will report back to members on the outcomes of the meeting in forthcoming editions of the WWDA Update Bulletin.

8. WomenSpeak Conference Sydney (11-12 November 2005)

WomenSpeak, auspiced by the YWCA is the largest of the four Commonwealth Government funded Secretariats with nearly 40 affiliated women's organisations. WomenSpeak holds two face-to-face Forums each year. Annie Parkinson (WWDA President) attended the first day of the WomenSpeak conference in November 2005. Work centred on review of the activities of member organisations; a briefing on new contract arrangements with and deliverables to the Office for Women (Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services), and an important session on Network Development. The agenda for the second day concentrated on Cross Secretariat business, summary of the second *What Women Want* Forum (with some material presented by Sue Salthouse), a review of the Young Women's Leadership Project, and a wide ranging discussion on future work and priorities. There has been a change of management of the WomenSpeak Secretariat, with Alexis Tindall being welcomed into the position vacated by Erica Lewis. WWDA has formally thanked Erica for her professional contribution to the work and development of WomenSpeak since its inauguration. WWDA takes this opportunity to congratulate Alexis for so ably taking on this important leadership position.

9. Mobility International USA Third International Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD 2006)

Mobility International USA (MIUSA) is a US-based, non-profit organization whose mission is to empower people with disabilities around the world to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development. Mobility International USA was founded in 1981 and works in four main areas to provide programs and services including: the National Clearinghouse on Disability & Exchange (NCDE); International Development & Disability; International Exchange Programs; and Women, Disability and Development. MIUSA works for empowerment, equal opportunities and human rights for women and girls with disabilities around the world. MIUSA's *Loud, Proud & Passionate!* projects focus on infusing the perspectives of women with disabilities into international women's movements and development agendas.

From August 9-27, 2006, MIUSA will host the Third International Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD 2006) in Eugene, Oregon, USA. MIUSA will select 30 disabled women who are new and emerging leaders from around the world, to come together for an intensive leadership training program to strengthen skills, exchange wisdom and strategies, increase international understanding and improve the lives of women and girls with disabilities around the world.

Young women with disabilities (age 20 – 30), women from rural areas and/or indigenous women with disabilities are especially encouraged to apply. MIUSA is also looking for women with disabilities who are first time visitors to the USA and have NOT participated in a MIUSA WILD program.

Interactive workshops and seminars will focus on:

- Priority Issues for Women with Disabilities
- Strategies for Change
- Building Networks of Support

Workshop participants will live with local homestay families, offering opportunities for cultural exchange and development of intercultural relationships. WILD participants will be responsible to raise funds for roundtrip airplane tickets from home countries to Eugene, Oregon and a program fee, which will cover most food and lodging.

Applications will be accepted from November 21, 2005 to March 31, 2006. Copies of the Application Forms can be obtained from Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) via email at: wwda@ozemail.com.au or from Mobility International USA via email at: womenleaders@miusa.org

For more information, contact:
 Mobility International USA: WILD 2006
 Email: womenleaders@miusa.org

10. WWDA Telecommunications Working Party - Update

10.1. Telstra Consumer Consultative Council Forum – Staying Connected: Credit Management and Essential Services

On 18 November 2005, the Telstra Consumer Consultative Council (TCCC) held a forum in Melbourne to examine ways in which people on low income or with poor money management skills could minimise incurring penalties for non payment of telephone services. Margaret Cooper attended the Forum on behalf of the WWDA Telecommunications Group. The forum was attended by representatives of charitable agencies, consumer organisations (both mainstream and specific to telecommunications), credit management providers and telecommunications service providers. Chris Dodds (ACOSS/LIMAC, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW) gave the keynote address: “*Just who is battling for the battlers?*” He saw telecommunications as an essential service and urged all the companies present to rethink their policies which may relate to people in crisis, and develop advertised, sensitive, accessible customer assistance plans. Those in financial crisis usually have multiple unpaid bills and to fully clear one debt may preclude them from paying anything off other outstanding debts, and from putting food on the table. He entreated companies show some understanding and put mechanisms in place to accommodate the partial payment of bills. A panel discussion followed, with service providers being unable to define ‘credit’, and many seeming unable to relate to the proposals put forward by the keynote speaker. A full copy of the report is available from the WWDA Telecommunications Group - contact the WWDA Office.

10.2. Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) – Disability Council

The last quarterly meeting for the ACIF Disability Advisory Body was held in Sydney on 7/8 December. One small change was formalised at that meeting – a change of name from the ‘Disability Advisory Council’ (DAB) to the Disability Council (DC). This gives our advisory group similar nomenclature to the more generalist Consumer Council which advises ACIF on a broad range of consumer issues. Both councils are involved in ACIF processes, with representatives having places on a large number of ACIF Working Committees. Important items under discussion were:

- Gunela Astbrink, Policy Advisor to the Telecommunications Disability Consumer Representation body (TEDICORE) and the ACIF International Standards Officer, Mike Johns, had been heavily involved in the organisation of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity Standardization Program (ASTAP) *Accessibility and Useability Workshop* which was held in November in Australia. ASTAP is the Asia Pacific Standards Setting body, and the work it does is of vital importance to ensure compatibility/interoperability of Telecommunications equipment throughout the region. Japan and Korea are leaders in some aspects of telecommunications in the region. For example, in Japan; registered people with disabilities automatically get a 50% discount on telecommunications products and services. In Korea, Broadband is delivered at 4 megabytes per second, compared to 512 kps (for the most fortunate).
- ACIF is undertaking a number of activities to review the consumer role within the organisation. There is ongoing discussion about the development of a Single Consumer Code (the DC has had an opportunity to contribute to this discussion), the Guidelines on Disability are under review (by the

DC itself), and Morgan Disney have been engaged as consultants to look at mechanisms for defining and formalising the role of consumers.

10.3. Combined ACIF Consumer Council & Disability Council Forum on 'Informed Consent'

As in many areas of our lives, contracts are an inevitable part of securing some telephone services and buying equipment. For the layperson, a standard contract can appear to be written in impenetrable English. Trade Practices dictate that there is an obligation on the part of the vendor to explain the contract to the buyer. However, it is a matter of concern to the Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) Disability Council that there is often a large gap between the provision of an explanation and its comprehension. This is pertinent in a number of the ACIF Consumer Codes, such as *Customer Information on Prices, Term and Conditions (C521:2004)*, and *Consumer Contracts (C620:2005)*. The two ACIF consumer bodies (Consumer Council & Disability Council) convened a Forum to examine issues about achieving Informed Consent. Guest Speakers were Andrew Wiltshire from the Australian Association of the Deaf (AAD) who presented his talk in AUSLAN, and Loretta Kreet representing the National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID). The third speaker was David Hinnit from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), who outlined the difficulty of proving 'unconscionable conduct' on the part of the vendor in order to make a successful prosecution.

Key issues are that:

- sales staff at the point of sale, need to be skilled in asking reflective questions, patience and understanding of disabilities (although salary structure of retainer plus commission is not conducive to such interaction, and staff turnover is high so that the time and cost involved in constantly up skilling staff is high);
- service providers need cultural change to address these issues and this can only be effected through leadership at the upper management level.

The next steps will involve more in-depth discussion with relevant ACIF Industry members. The full report on the Forum is available from WWDA.

10.4. Budget Pay Suggestion made to Telstra

On 25 August 2005, WWDA wrote to the Telstra Group Manager (Consumer Affairs) about Telstra's new BudgetPay initiative which is part of the Telstra Access for Everyone package of plans to enable people to make choices on the least expensive way to manage their telecommunication costs. WWDA suggested an extension of the BudgetPay initiative to include a system akin to those that are well developed by utility companies. Many such companies have systems which enable small payments to be made fortnightly by cash or cheque to a post office. When customers have a good regular payment record they are given some leeway if a payment is missed, and are not harassed by almost-immediate receipt of letters of demand.

On 21 December 2005, WWDA received a comprehensive answer, pointing out that there is a charge per transaction to the Service Provider which sets up such a system, and that this is a major reason for Telstra rejecting the WWDA proposal. However, the Telstra Payment can be used in a similar manner at Post Offices (and Telstra Shop fronts). It was further explained that Telstra does allow a reasonable latitude for late payment before fees are charged or letters of demand sent when the customer is using one of the Access for Everyone payment options. Telstra also has in place a Direct Debit by phone option which allows customers to set up their details and then make payments at any time. In this way customers can avoid the scenario of a regular Direct Debit putting their account in debt when the debit date coincides with a time when the account balance is not sufficient to cover the charge.

You can view all the Access for Everyone initiatives online at:
<http://www.telstra.com.au/accessforeveryone/index.htm>.

10.5. New Telstra Mobile Network

Telstra's proposal to install a new Australia-wide 3G mobile network was announced towards the end of December 2005. (*The term '3G' is used to describe the new types of telecommunications networks which have multi-access functions in that they can simultaneously carry both voice and internet functions using dual channels. In 2G networks, each call required an exclusive connection, and connection speeds were low. In contrast 3G connections allow multiple users to share the same wide frequency and download speeds are up to six times faster.*)

The proposal raised immediate concerns amongst the hearing impaired, as they have already experienced a prolonged loss of access to many telecommunication services when digital mobile phones replaced the analogue ones. Telstra is working with various individuals and organisations to ensure that the new network provides excellent service, allowing SMS, MMS (photo/video transmission), video message bank, and video calling/AUSLAN. The new system will therefore offer enhanced services.

11. Women With Disabilities Australian Capital Territory (WWDACT) – Inclusion Innovators

The WWDA affiliate organisation located in the ACT (WWDACT) has recently been part of an exciting venture which culminated in it getting recognition in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Inclusion Awards held on the International Day for People with a Disability on 3 December 2005. The chain of events which led to this recognition began in September 2004 when Louise Bannister and Sue Salthouse (WWDA & WWDA ACT members) were lamenting the fact that there were no accessible gyms around for people in wheelchairs. Since we couldn't afford personal trainers, we decided to start up our own exercise program. So from a somewhat mercenary motivation, a fitness program for women who use mobility aids was born.

The project was funded with an Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Innovation Grant, and had a community inclusion component, in that a fitness class for women with disabilities was run concurrently with a similar class for able bodied women in the 55-60+ year old age group. In the former class, the 15-20 participants had individual fitness programs using a range of simple equipment including weights and dynabands. A team of volunteers provided the one-on-one assistance where it was needed. In the second class, one instructor was sufficient for group exercises. At the conclusion of classes the two groups integrated for a healthy soup lunch, eaten while listening to a guest speaker. Topics ranged from money management to massage. At first interaction was stilted. Many of the women with disabilities had endured considerable periods of social isolation, whereas many of the able bodied women had never had friends with disabilities and were at a loss as to how to 'break the ice' and interact.

The success of the project was such that the Australian Capital Territory Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) decided to change the focus of the work it does, and develop programs which target marginalised groups of women. For its part, the YWCA invited Louise Bannister to train as a fitness instructor and join their staff in 2006. Enthusiasm and talent as a motivator are more important than the ability to actually do the exercises. Louise will graduate from the Australian Institute of Fitness in April, and intends to complete an additional month's course to qualify as a personal trainer.

The success of our integrated fitness program has us inspired. But the degree of unmet need in the community is huge. We are currently brainstorming ways of how to make such programs sustainable and independent of Grant funding – a challenge not yet solved. However our innovation was also a source of inspiration to the judging panel of the ACT Inclusion Awards. We were thrilled when we won the 'Best Community Project' from a field of 16 nominees, and even more pleased to win the overall prize (from a field of more than 40 nominees), the 'ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Award for 2005'.

In 2006, the WWDACT-WCHM-YWCA team aims to expand our program to other locations and make each one sustainable. This will mean working collaboratively with a number of other organisations and businesses, so that the 'inclusion' message spreads further afield. Of course the Awards in themselves are not essential, but until barriers to full participation in community no longer exist, they are an incentive we intend to use to encourage others – individuals, organisations, businesses, governments instrumentalities, to change to a more inclusive way of operating.

12. News from Other Organisations

12.1. Research Report – Giving Australia: Research on Philanthropy in Australia

The 'Giving Australia: Research on Philanthropy in Australia' Report was launched in late 2005 by the Minister for Family & Community Services, Senator Kay Patterson. Commissioned by the Department of Family and Community Services, on behalf of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership, the Project was co-ordinated by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) in collaboration with the University of Technology in Sydney, the Queensland University of Technology, and private sector bodies.

The 'Giving Australia' Report shows that the giving of money, goods and services by individuals and business in 2004 reached an estimated \$11 billion (excluding the amount donated to the Tsunami appeals). This giving comprised of \$7.7 billion from individuals and \$3.3 billion from businesses. The Report found that the USA generates more than twice the level of giving than Australia.

A copy of the full Report can be obtained via the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership Website. Go to: <http://www.partnerships.gov.au/index.shtml>.

As at January 19 2006, there was only a PDF version of the Report available, however WWDA has requested that the Department provide accessible versions of the Report on its website.

12.2. Women's Services Network (WESNET) Research Report Available

Established in 1992, the Women's Services Network (WESNET) is a national women's peak advocacy body which works on behalf of women and children who are or have experienced domestic and family violence. With almost 400 members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, safe houses and information/ referral services.

WESNET's recent report, '*Women's Refuges, Shelters, Outreach & Support Services in Australia: from Sydney squat to complex services challenging domestic & family violence*', provides an assessment of the progress that has been made in expanding accommodation and support options available to women experiencing, or escaping, domestic violence and what options or directions might be pursued in the future. The research documented in this report measured progress through a national survey of services; a survey of 'key informants' from all States and Territories; special data analysis by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; consultations with women in each State and Territory; and visits to services. The emerging picture, as a result of this 2003 survey of 137 crisis accommodation, outreach, information, support and advocacy services is of complex domestic and family violence services, responding to high demand.

The Report is available via the WESNET Website. At this stage, only a PDF version of the full Report is available, although an HTML version of the Executive Summary is provided.

For more information about the Report, or WESNET, you can contact:

Women's Services Network (WESNET)
PO Box 1579 Canberra City ACT 2601
Phone 02) 6247 1616 Fax 02) 6247 1616
Email: wesnet@wesnet.org.au
Web: www.wesnet.org.au

12.3. National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) Releases Strategic Plan

The National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) is the national peak consumer organization representing the rights and interests of people from a non-English speaking background with disability, their families and carers across Australia. NEDA has recently released its Strategic Plan 2008 and has identified four areas as priorities over the next three years: 1) Policy Advice 2) Representation 3) Networks & Partnerships 4) Organisational Capacity.

Copies of the NEDA Strategic Plan can be obtained by contacting:

NEDA
PO Box 381, Harris Park NSW 2150
Ph: (02) 9687 8933 TTY: (02) 9687 6325
Fax: (02) 9635 5355
Email: office@neda.org.au
Web: www.neda.org.au

12.4. World Health Organisation (WHO) Landmark Study on Domestic Violence

The first-ever World Health Organization (WHO) study on domestic violence reveals that intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence in women's lives - much more so than assault or rape by strangers or acquaintances. The study (released in late November 2005) reports on the enormous toll physical and sexual violence by husbands and partners has on the health and well-being of women around the world and the extent to which partner violence is still largely hidden. *"This study shows that women are more at*

risk from violence at home than in the street and this has serious repercussions for women's health," said Dr LEE Jong-wook, Director-General of WHO at the study release in Geneva. "The study also shows how important it is to shine a spotlight on domestic violence globally and treat it as a major public health issue."

A full copy of the Report is available at:

http://www.who.int/entity/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/full_en.pdf

12.5. Brain Injury Australia National Conference May 2006

Brain Injury Australia (BIA) is holding its Inaugural National Conference in Queensland from 31 May – 2nd June 2006. With the theme of ‘Insights & Solutions’ the Conference offers the opportunity to increase understanding of the problems faced by individuals living with brain injury, to strengthen partnerships, and to increase awareness of services, programs and new approaches in brain injury research.

For more information, you can contact the Conference organisers:

ACQ Conference + Event Management

PO Box 995, Indooroopilly QLD 4068

Ph: 07 3725 5588 Fax: 07 3715 8166

Email: events@acqi.org.au

Web: www.acqconferences.com.au

12.6. Social Enterprise Partnerships (SEP) National Policy Conference May 2006

This inaugural National Policy Conference ‘Empowering Individuals and Families in the Human Services’, will explore public policy for an agenda of empowerment for individuals and families in indigenous communities, disability, mental health, aged care, youth, education, health care, community building and family strengthening. Previous SEP conferences on this theme have explored practical innovation and social enterprise solutions. This conference will explore the policy settings we need from commonwealth and state governments to support and complement this practical empowerment agenda. By ‘empowerment’ we mean person-centred and relationship-centred arrangements in social policy and service provision, as distinct from institution or agency-centred systems. The Conference will take place at the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre, Melbourne, 16-17 May 2006.

For more information, you can contact:

Social Enterprise Partnerships

2 Elm Street, North Melbourne VIC 3051

Ph: 03 9326 4481 Fax: 03 9326 8030

Email - vic@partnerships.org.au

Web: <http://www.partnerships.org.au/index.htm>

13. Review of the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP)

The National Disability Advocacy Program funds 73 advocacy organisations to help people with disabilities, their families and carers to get involved in community life as fairly and as fully as possible. Under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement, advocacy is a shared responsibility of the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. State and territory governments contribute approximately \$4 million towards advocacy services, and a small number of advocacy services receive both Australian Government and state and territory funding. A review of the National Disability Advocacy Program was completed in May 1999. The review was undertaken to ensure that Australian Government resources committed to disability advocacy services were being targeted in the most effective manner, and in line with government policies. A copy of the 1999 Review Report is available from the Department of Families & Communities website.

Go to: <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/representation-ndap.htm>

The Australian Government has recently announced another Review of the National Disability Advocacy Program. Social Options Australia has been appointed by the Commonwealth Department of Families and Communities to undertake an independent evaluation of the National Disability Advocacy Program. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the current way in which the Program operates against its stated goal and objectives. The areas to be evaluated are the extent to which the individual organisations funded through the NDAP provide their services effectively; use of measures and indicators to assess and maintain performance standards; and the funding system. The Consultants undertaking the Review will be undertaking

a limited consultation process, which will consist of focus groups and written submissions. Closing date for written submissions is 28 February 2006.

For more information on the Review, the dates and venues of focus groups, along with key questions for the evaluation, can be obtained by contacting:

Joan Mantziavas
NDAP Submissions Coordinator
Social Options Australia
Ph: (08) 8177 2061
Fax: (08) 8357 5254
Email: joan@soa.com.au

14. New on WWDA Website

Recent additions to the WWDA Website include:

Women With Disabilities - Still 'At A Loss' - By Sue Salthouse (November 2005)

Paper written and presented by Sue Salthouse on behalf of WWDA at the *'What Women Want'* Workshop - A Workshop to Examine the Legislation to Enact the Federal Government's Proposal for Reform of Industrial Relations and its Welfare-to-Work Strategy; Friday 11 November 2005, Canberra.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/w2wnov05.htm>

'Perfect in My Imperfection' - By Lina Pane (November 2005)

Paper written by Lina Pane, who has expertise in the disability field as a leader, community development worker, social worker, researcher and published disabled feminist writer and speaker. Lina is actively involved with Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) as a member of the management committee.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/perfect.htm>

'The Puppetry of Poverty' - By Sue Salthouse (November 2005)

A Paper written and presented by Sue Salthouse on behalf of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) at the *'Fair Go Going Gone? Public Policy and the Re-framing of Values'* Conference; Melbourne, November 2005.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/perfect.htm>

'Jumping through Hoops' - Welfare and Industrial Relations Reform implications for women with disabilities - By Sue Salthouse (July 2005)

A Paper written and presented by Sue Salthouse on behalf of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) at the *'What Women Want'* Workshop - A Workshop on the Effect of the Federal Government's Recent Policy Changes on Women of Working Age. July 2005, Canberra.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/w2wjuly05.htm>

WWDA Submission to the Australian Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other Measures) Bill 2005 and the Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005 (November 2005).

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/w2wsen.htm>

WWDA Submission to the Australian Government on the on the 'Chairman's Text for a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities'(November 2005)

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/unconvsub3.htm>

WWDA Submission to the Commonwealth Government's 'Review of the Commonwealth Disability Strategy' - Stage Two (September 2005)

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/cdssub2.htm>

WWDA Information and Referral Directory

The WWDA Information and Referral Directory is being regularly updated and expanded. It contains an extensive amount of information about services and organizations across a wide range of issue areas. Just some examples of what you can find include:

- All disability and related organizations across Australia, including national organizations;
- Every legal centre and service in Australia;
- Organisations Australia wide that provide individual advocacy services to people with disabilities;
- Information on where to go to get aids and equipment;
- Details of services that can help with assisted reproduction;
- Agencies that deal with violence and abuse, including listings of crisis services, women's shelters and more;
- All women's health centres, services and organizations around Australia;

And much, much more.

Go to: <http://www.wwda.org.au/portmain.htm>



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