

 Blind Citizens WA Inc.

Friday 6th May 2016

Manager,

Communications Accessibility,

PO Box 13310,

Law Courts,

Melbourne VIC 8010

Via Email: accessibility@communications.gov.au

Re: Communications Accessibility: 2016 and Beyond

Blind Citizens WA thanks the Department for the opportunity to respond to the Communications Accessibility: 2016 and Beyond consultation.

We are writing to you because we are concerned about the options proposed in the discussion paper and their implications for people with disability. Given our limited resources we are unable to make a full submission, and therefore lend our support in full to the Australian Communications Consumer Action network (ACCAN) submission.

Blind Citizens WA Inc. is a not-for-profit peer led organisation run by and for people who are blind or vision impaired or Deafblind in Western Australia.  Our members offer peer support and advocate for themselves and for others who are blind or vision impaired or Deafblind. We are particularly concerned about the proposed options because the communications needs of people who are DeafBlind are quite unique and also quite diverse. Without the ability to communicate people who are Deafblind are totally isolated from their community. Some of our members who are blind are also losing their ability to hear due to age or other reasons.

We understand that since the introduction of new relay services there has been an increase in the use of the National Relay Service. Any improvements in the provision of greater access to communications for people with disability provide benefits for all Australians. The advancement of digital technologies has undoubtedly provided more accessible and usable communication channels for many people who are unable to use standard voice telephones. However, these new technologies do not provide adequate alternative communication in all instances hence the continued essentiality of the National Relay Service.

* There must be additional funding over and above the $20 Million (excluding GST) cap to maintain full access to the NRS over the current contract and into the future. This will ensure NRS users continue to have equitable access to telecommunications as provisioned under the Universal Service Obligation.
* Guarantee all current relay services are available on a 24/7 365 basis, including video relay.
* Guarantee all relay services provide 24/7 365 access to 000 or 106 emergency services.
* Review the current Disability Equipment Programs to ensure they are fit-for-purpose in today’s communications environment.

We strongly encourage the Government to consider the ongoing essential nature of the NRS as the equivalent communication channel for people who are unable to use mainstream communication equipment and services.

Sincerely,

Erika Webb

Admin / Advocacy Officer

Blind Citizens WA

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