

**THE PROGRAM OF APPLIANCES FOR DISABLED
PEOPLE (PADP)**

Organisation: People with Disability Australia
Name: Mr Matthew Bowden
Position: Acting Co-Chief Executive Officer
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people with disability

ABN 98 879 981 198

People with Disability Australia Incorporated

Postal Address: PO Box 666
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Street Address: Ground Floor, 52 Pitt Street
Redfern NSW 2016

Phone: 02 9370 3100
Toll Free: 1800 422 015
Fax: 02 9318 1372
TTY: 02 9318 2138
Toll Free TTY: 1800 422 016
Email: pwd@pwd.org.au
TIS: 13 14 50 **NRS:** 1800 555 677

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General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Inquiry into the Program of Appliances for Disabled People (PADP)

People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a national disability rights and advocacy organisation. Its primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWD also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement. PWD was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own. PWD has a cross-disability focus – we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability.

PWD provides an Individual Advocacy Service (IAS) to people with disability across the state of NSW. This service provides information and advice, as well as individual advocacy across a range of issues that affect the lives of people with disability. Access to aids and equipment is a common issue for people contacting the service. Access to aids and equipment is central to people's independence and community engagement – a key to social inclusion. People who contact the IAS about the program usually find themselves in one of two situations. The first is people who are not aware of the program. The second is those who have experienced frustration in navigating their way through the program. These experiences provide PWD with a lot of the information that underpins this submission and our calls for reform of the program.

PWD has actively contributed to the reform of PADP. This has included being a member of the PADP State Advisory Committee for over a decade. We have participated in the Department of Health review of PADP conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) recently. While we are supportive of the consultation processes we are concerned at the numerous reviews and inquiries that have happened without any fundamental change coming out of these processes. We do welcome the recent announcement by the Federal and State governments of additional once off funding to the program.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee. We are available to make verbal submissions to any hearings that may be held by the committee if the committee so desires.

Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) Review of PADP

In 2006 PricewaterhouseCoopers produced the report from its review of the PADP. PWD has focused its comments on the recommendations contained within that report.

PWD is concerned about the effect of increasing the co-payment for aids and equipment (recommendation 19). Any increase will have a negative impact on the lives of many people with disability. The additional cost of disability is well established. The Physical Disability Council of Australia (PDCA) and the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) of the University of NSW have published research on the impact of the cost of disability. We therefore do not support this recommendation.

PWD was heartened to hear that some of the PADP lodgement centres called for the abolition of the co-payment as they believe administratively it is not worth collecting. One of the stated aims of the PWC review was to find measures to reduce waste and inefficiency. We believe that the abolition of the co-payment is one way of reducing inefficiency. This would also reduce the financial burden on people with disability.

PWD is also concerned at the possible impact of proposed changes to the level of income at which different levels of payments would come into effect (recommendation 20). PWD believes that an increase in the co-payment or a change to the income streams could force many people, including families with children or young adults with disability into making decisions about necessary equipment based on financial considerations rather than the need. PWD believes that this could lead to people with disability becoming more isolated.

PWD welcomes the recommendations in the PWC review that make the PADP system easier to navigate (recommendations 13, 17 and 21). The current system can be complex. People often contact PWD seeking support to get through the system. A simpler system will lead to independent navigation of the program and result in better outcomes for people with less frustration.

PWD supports the measures outlined in the PWC review that will increase people's knowledge of the scheme (recommendations 5 and 17). Many people in contact with PWD are not aware of the PADP. People who are aware of the PADP often are not aware of the details of the program such as the eligibility criteria. Easier navigation and more information about the program will help more people to access it. Further to the PWC recommendations PWD recommends that a public information campaign is undertaken. To be effective this should involve organisations of people with disability, peak bodies and health professionals.

PWC outlines a number of recommendations (1, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 17) that aim to streamline the operation of the scheme. PWD supports these recommendations only to the extent that they make the program more effective in meeting the needs of people getting aids and equipment. PWD feels that the focus of any reform to the program needs to be focused on delivering better outcomes.

Maintenance of aids and equipment is an ongoing concern of a number of the people who contact our IAS. Ongoing maintenance must form part of the program. This should include regular maintenance and servicing of aids and equipment when appropriate. Allowances also need to be made when planning the program for unexpected damage. On this basis PWD supports recommendation 17.

PWD also supports the intention of recommendation 30 relating to changing the name of the program. The use of the term 'disabled people' is not in line with generally accepted conventions of referring to the person first and their disability second. NSW Health also use other antiquated terms such as 'special needs groups' in their PADP policies. Greater awareness of appropriate language and putting people before a disability or diagnosis is likely to result in better experiences and outcomes for people with disability.

Funding of PADP

Outside of the recommendations of the PWC review of the program PWD maintains its long held concern that the program is not funded adequately. To meet the current needs of people accessing the program more money on a recurrent basis is needed. PWD has advocated for an increase in funds over a long period of time. As mentioned above PWD welcomes the announcement by the NSW & Commonwealth Governments of a one off funding increase. While this and any increase is welcome a substantial ongoing investment needs to be made in this essential program.

PWD echoes the calls of the Council of Social Services NSW (NCOSS), the Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN), Spinal Cord Injury Australia and others to increase the budget of the program. PWD calls for an additional \$24.4 million per year to be provided from the next financial year. This amount must then be maintained and grow to \$100 million per year by 2014/2015. This is to meet unmet need and meet the growing need for the program.

Entitlement, not eligibility.

PWD believes that the program needs to change from being a scheme based on eligibility to one of entitlement.

At the moment if a person meets the criteria set out for the program then that persons need will be assessed. Whether a person gets equipment is then balanced with other concerns such as the programs budget, that person's need compared to the other people who have applied to the program, and whether or not a person has recently received other equipment from the program recently.

PWD believes that this basis of the program needs to change. If a person has a shown need for equipment or aids and the cost is prohibitive then the person should be entitled to it under the program. People should not have to compete with others when it comes to something as fundamental as being able to live independently and access the community.

International Policy Context

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), recently ratified by the Australian Government, articulates the necessity of improvements to the program. The articles most relevant to this program are as follows:

Article 19

Living independently and being included in the community

States Parties to this Convention recognize the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community, including by ensuring that:

(a) Persons with disabilities have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement;

(b) Persons with disabilities have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community;

(c) Community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.

Article 20

Personal mobility

States Parties shall take effective measures to ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities, including by:

(a) Facilitating the personal mobility of persons with disabilities in the manner and at the time of their choice, and at affordable cost;

(b) Facilitating access by persons with disabilities to quality mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies and forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including by making them available at affordable cost;

(c) Providing training in mobility skills to persons with disabilities and to specialist staff working with persons with disabilities;

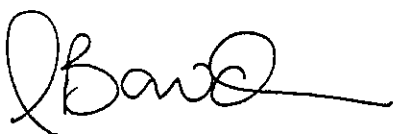
(d) Encouraging entities that produce mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies to take into account all aspects of mobility for persons with disabilities.

These articles outline the responsibility of the NSW government. They provide the government with the impetus for change. PWD believes that to comply with the UNCRPD the program must be appropriately funded and become an entitlement based program.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission on the Program of Appliances for Disabled People. We hope that the ideas raised in this submission can be implemented in timely fashion. We urge the government to take this opportunity to improve the program so that it meets its own aims. We believe the UNCRPD requires improvements to the program to be made so that people with disability who require aids and equipment can acquire them and increase a person's access to and participation in their community.

If you would like to discuss any of the matters raised in this submission, please contact Dean Price, Senior Advocate, 02 9370 3100.

Yours sincerely



MATTHEW BOWDEN
Co-Chief Executive Officer (Acting)