

Submission  
No 45

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICES PROVIDED OR FUNDED OR  
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGEING, DISABILITY AND  
HOME CARE**

**Organisation:** Association of Blind Citizens of NSW  
**Name:** Ms Sondra Wibberley  
**Date received:** 06/08/2010

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## **ASSOCIATION OF BLIND CITIZENS OF NSW INC**

### **Submission: Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues**

#### **Inquiry in to Services Provided or Funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare**

The Association of Blind Citizens of NSW INC (hereafter referred to as the Association) is a small not-for-profit consumer organisation which provides assistance to people who are blind or vision impaired. Our services include peer support, a browsable lending library, a sewing service, recreational activities, and individualised technology training services. We also make representations on behalf of people who are blind or vision impaired to government and other service providers on a range of matters impacting directly on their lives.

The Association was established in 1910 and is one of the oldest community organisations providing support to people with vision disabilities in Australia. (Comprehensive information about the organisation's work is outlined in our latest Annual Report and forms Attachment 1 to this submission.)

The Association has received some funding from the NSW Government to assist its operations since the early 1980's. This funding has been indexed in recent years and now stands at \$31,000. Unfortunately, this amount falls far short of what is needed for maintenance and further development of essential services for blind and vision impaired people in NSW. At least \$100,000 per year is needed by our organisation to enable us to maintain and enhance vital

services not provided elsewhere in the community to assist this small but important section of the general population. We would also point out that the Association provides a range of direct services which are critical in assisting people who are blind or vision impaired to live in the community with dignity and independence which the Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare fails to take in to account and for which we receive no ongoing funding.

Regardless of relentless fundraising efforts our income continues to decline in real and actual terms (as shown in our 2009 audited Financial Statement which forms Attachment 2 to this submission), while general operating costs are increasing.

Despite several representations to the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare and our local member regarding our circumstances and their impact on the delivery of services to people who are blind or vision impaired we have been unable to secure additional funding from the State Government other than that provided through the indexation of our general operating grant and a one-off grant for our Technology Program which provides individual instruction to people with vision disabilities in the use of various mainstream and specialised technologies needed to assist with important forms of communication and information access. This funding is needed to meet staffing and other service provision expenses, research quantify and address unmet need (especially outside the Sydney Metropolitan Area), develop and implement outreach initiatives for the benefit of service clients and ensure compliance with NSW Government organisational governance and service

delivery requirements for ADHC funded disability service organisations in NSW.

Given the above circumstances the quality, effectiveness and delivery of the Association's services to people who are blind or vision impaired is significantly compromised as follows:

- Due to our limited funding, we are unable to employ full-time professional staff with our Office only now being open 3 days per week. Consequently, we are unable to develop, implement and extend programs and services, for example our sewing service, peer support and individualised technology instruction, needed to enhance support for clients across the state.
- Our Librarian, who assists clients who are blind or have low vision in accessing books in Braille, audio format or large print from our library, is only able to work 4 hours per week at a very low salary and our weekly craft classes need to be taught by voluntary instructors due to severe funding constraints.
- We have an urgent need for a policy officer to meet ADHC requirements but have no funding for such a position. As a result, work in this area is extremely slow and must be undertaken by Management Committee members in their own time. The preparation of the present submission is a classic example of this reality.
- The Association relies heavily on its volunteers without whom it would be impossible to implement our existing services and undertake fundraising activities.

To sum up: the Association strongly supports and applauds the requirement for high quality and effective service delivery to people with disabilities in NSW with this to be underpinned by legislative requirements and associated standards. However, ADHC'S present process is such that a disproportionate amount of time and effort must be devoted to accounting for compliance which detracts from our capacity to deliver high quality and effective services to clients for which there is no growth funding.

We are very much aware that this situation applies to other smaller disability organisations in our community.

This ongoing and worsening situation, we argue, should be of serious concern to the Standing Committee given its detrimental impact on the quality, effectiveness and delivery of essential services to people with vision and other disabilities in NSW and requires significant and immediate attention.

Thank you for considering our submission. We await with interest the outcome of this Inquiry.