



Serena Ovens,
Executive Officer

Welcome to the end of financial year PDCN Live!

As we head towards the end of June and finalising all our year's funded projects it's always a busy time for the team.

We will wrap up the last of the ADHC NDIS Ready funding, however we have

gained some additional funding from the NDIA which will allow us to continue to assist people with navigating the scheme, and in particular self-managing their plans.

The peer support project is chugging along and we've added some peer-to-peer individual mentoring, allowing people to work on some individually identified areas of skills development.

Unfortunately our core government funding is still uncertain after the end of the next financial year, and is currently finishing in June 2020. However, as you'll read later in the newsletter, the Stand By Me campaign is still very much alive and working on ensuring this doesn't come to pass.

We've also had a few changes in the PDCN team – and I'd like to take this opportunity to say farewell and thanks to Ellen Small. After nearly five years with the team, Ellen has gone onto new challenges in the sector, but her dedication to PDCN and work she undertook here was exemplary!

Enjoy the newsletter!

Serena

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PDCN President Chris Sparks

Awarded Order of Australia Medal



Over the June long weekend, PDCN's President Chris Sparks was recognised on the Queen's Birthday Honours List with a Medal of the Order of Australia for his services to people with disability.

Chris has spent much of his life involved in Paralympic sport as a member of the NSW men's wheelchair basketball team from 1983-1991 and the Australian Wheelchair Basketball team from 1985-1990. He has also given much of his free time to various disability organisations on voluntary boards, from Wheelchair Sports NSW (1981-1996), the Northcott Society (1993 – 2002), and now PDCN from 2016 to the present.

In addition, Chris was a member of the NSW Minister for Disability's Disability Council from 2012-2015, providing expert advice to the NSW Government, and is currently

Vice Chair of his local Bega Valley Council's Access and Inclusion committee.

Coupled with his career, in which he also worked at executive level within the assistive technology sphere (Dynamic Living Designs, Seating Dynamics, Invacare, and the Assistive Technology Suppliers Australasia) there are not too many wheelchair users who wouldn't have run into Chris at some stage, or benefited from his huge knowledge of adaptive equipment.

Chris is a tireless advocate for access and inclusion, and PDCN congratulates him on this well-deserved recognition of everything he has achieved!

PDCN membership renewals are due!

You will shortly receive an email with instructions on how to renew.

If you have any questions, please contact us on 1800 688 831.

Not a member yet? Join today at

www.pdcnsw.org.au/get-involved/become-a-member



Sydney Opera House

Accessibility and Inclusion Improvements



In May we were invited to bring a group of PDCN members to a consultation meeting with the Sydney Opera House to discuss upgrades that are occurring over the next few years. These upgrades are the most significant since the Opera House first opened in 1973 and will have a specific focus on improving accessibility in and around the venue. It was fabulous to be able to provide expertise and advice on the works being undertaken, and we have asked to be kept informed throughout the upgrade and will continue to provide information to you, our members, as it is received.

Upgrades currently underway to improve access include:

- Removing steps and replacing them with a ramp on the western side of the East Circular Quay entrance, allowing for a continuous path of travel from Circular Quay to the Opera House
- Two new ramps inside the entrance to replace the stairs
- A new lift in the main box office foyer to provide an independent path of travel to the Joan Sutherland Theatre. This will complement the new lift and passageway to the northern foyers which opened in November 2018
- Upgrading the area under the Monumental Steps with new, even paving to create a lighter space and remove trip hazards
- Work being undertaken on the online booking system to enable booking of accessible seats via this process (note this may take some time to implement).

Works which begin in February 2020 will include:

- A new accessible passageway to connect the Concert Hall Southern Foyer to areas currently not wheelchair accessible, including the Northern Foyer

(continued over)

- Upgrading an existing back-of-house lift in the main box office foyer to take patrons to the Concert Hall southern foyer. This will complement the new passage and lift in the northern foyer, and provide an independent path of travel to the Concert Hall for the first time
- Up to 34 new wheelchair-accessible positions in various locations inside the Concert Hall
- Wheelchair-accessible toilets and four back-of-house toilets for performers
- Lowering the stage, raising the backstage area and widening the wing space and corridors to make it easier for performers to access the stage.

Accessible transportation to and drop-off at the Opera House currently available includes:

- Daytime - accessible buggies currently running from the roundabout at the end of Macquarie St
- Evening - an accessible drop off point which is available at the underground loading area from 6pm with a request for access at the front gate
- An accessible shuttle bus from Circular Quay which runs for 1 hour and 45 minutes before a performance. This bus loops throughout this time period and continues to collect patrons.

For more information, see the website www.sydneyoperahouse.com/our-story/Renewal/overview.html

PDCN Programs and Policy - The Year in Review

As the financial year draws to a close we have once again been strongly active across all facets of the organisation, from systemic advocacy to information linkages and capacity building. Here's a rundown of some of the main activities our team have been involved in in 2018/19.

The NDIS Ready project conducted seven NDIS Plans in Practice workshops and 24 individual support sessions. This year the workshops have been a one-day event, with smaller groups allowing for more personalised and richer sharing of information. Common areas of interest included a better understanding of NDIS funding flexibility, alternate ways to find required supports, preparing for a plan review and discussions about assistive technology delays. This ADHC-funded program has now concluded, however we're pleased to have been granted new funding under the NDIS Information Linkages and Capacity Building - Disabled People's and Families Organisations program. This funding will be used to strengthen PDCN's internal governance and reporting processes, and will provide a further five workshops and 24 individual support sessions for self-managing NDIS participants. We also received a small grant from the Department of Social Services to support the ongoing costs of our voluntary staff and board. *(continued over)*



We've also been very busy on the policy front, providing nineteen submissions to government and regulatory bodies in 2018/19. These included the Productivity Commission's National Disability Agreement Review, and the DSS National Disability Strategy Review. We provided seven letters of feedback and two letters of support, including to the Australian Building Codes Board's Accessible Housing Options Paper, and the NSW Department of Justice's Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

PDCN also provided evidence to two crucial NSW Parliamentary Inquiries: the Inquiry into the NDIS and provision of disability services in NSW, and the Inquiry into the provisions of the Ageing and Disability Commissioner Bill.

A total of 11 one-off consultations were held, including for the DSS's National Disability Strategy Consultation, and the Audit Office of NSW's look at access to public transport for people with disability. These sat alongside two issue-specific consultations of PDCN members: surveys on NDIS Thin Markets, and Mobility Scooters & Motorised Wheelchairs.

PDCN is also a member of 24 advisory boards and committees in both government and NGO sectors, including the Ministry of Health's NGO advisory group, the FACS Disability Inclusion Plan Implementation Committee, and the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design (ANUHD).

The Peer Support project now facilitates 11 groups across Blacktown, Liverpool, Marrickville, Shoalhaven, Nowra and Northern Rivers, including an online group and a dedicated leadership group. Key group events included the Liverpool group organising for local police officers to speak about domestic and family violence, and a representative from EWON speaking at the Blacktown meeting. The Noah's Parent Room group in Nowra hosted a session from Hire Up (an online platform for people with disability to find support workers), and the Shoalhaven self-advocacy group hosted a visit by new Minister for Disability Services Gareth Ward.

We also started a peer-to-peer mentoring pilot project based in Nowra in the last quarter of the financial year. The outcomes of this pilot will provide valuable information with a view to offer peer-to-peer mentoring to a broader community of people with disability. If you would like to know more about the project as either a potential mentor or person wishing to access mentoring, please contact PDCN at admin@pdcnsw.org.au.

Stand By Me

Post-Election Update

With the outcome of the NSW election now behind us the Stand By Me campaign is back in full swing looking for a resolution to the imminent loss of advocacy funding in June 2020. We have been meeting with numerous MPs across all parties, particularly those new to Parliament, to brief them on this critical situation. We thank MPs Mark Coure, David Elliott, Robyn Preston, Nathaniel Smith, Peter Sidgreaves and Wendy Tuckerman; and MLCs Mark Banasiak and Abigail Boyd for taking the time to hear our concerns, and raise these with their respective parties, and the Minister.

We have been heartened by the new Minister for Disability Services Gareth Ward's willingness to meet with both the NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance and PDCN itself, to hear our concerns, and also his preparedness to continue this on a regular basis. However, we still need the NSW Government to recognise the importance of disability advocacy for the 1.4 million people

with disability in NSW in the long-term, and the urgency of bringing about a resolution to the issue of sustained, secure, independent funding.

We are also pleased to advise that the City of Sydney Council has put their unanimous support behind us, approving a motion of support for the Stand By Me campaign (*photo on left*).

However, we are not there yet – and the Minister himself advised that the most powerful message he can hear is from people with disability themselves, speaking about how important advocacy

organisations and the work they do for you are. The Minister suggested that you visit your local MP and ask them to speak to him on your behalf, or send him a letter directly yourself. PDCN can provide help if you need it, just give us a call – or you can find resources and sample letters on the Stand By Me website – www.standbyme.org.au/resources.

Let's work together to ensure you have a voice and continue to be considered and included in the society in which you live! Whilst people with disability can't access transport, get good health care, decent employment or have their basic access rights met, advocacy is still crucially needed.

