



Serena Ovens
Chief Executive Officer

Early 2020 has been a busy time for the PDCN team and Board.

We received confirmation of our major ILC Grant and the funds themselves have now been received, with the program 'live' from late February.

The last few weeks have seen us interviewing for staff for the project roles and I'm really pleased to say the calibre of applications has been astounding! We look forward to finalising offers, and welcoming three new members to the PDCN team.

In addition, we are progressing with our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, and to ensure we are focusing on what our members see as the major priorities for PDCN in this next period we will shortly email out a members' survey to get your valued opinions. Please do take the time to complete it, so we can ensure we are meeting our member's needs.

The Stand By Me Campaign is beginning to rev up once more, as we've yet to hear a response from the NSW Government regarding their implementation of the recommendations from the Ageing and Disability Commissioner's review on advocacy funding. We are generally pleased with the Commissioner's findings and suggestions for the sector moving forwards, though we would call to be a part of an implementation committee. We know the devil is in the detail when it comes to refining the broad recommendations and setting a framework for future disability advocacy funding. Once again, a deadline is looming, with funding only guaranteed to the end of 2020, hence the Disability Advocacy Alliance is looking at what our next steps are to ensure the successful implementation of advocacy funding for the longer term. Stay tuned – we may need your help once more!

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We are currently preparing our submission on the NSW Disability Inclusion Act (2014). This Act, the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan and Disability Inclusion Action Plans that sit within it, are some of the most critical legislation and working plans for the continued improvement and inclusion of people with disability in NSW. We want to ensure that the next evolution of the Act is even more rigorous in its push towards equal rights for all. To that end, we've run two consultations with our members (in conjunction with a number of our member organisations – Spinal Cord Injuries Australia, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and Stroke Recovery Association) and one with Alliance members, to once again enshrine the voices of people with disability in our response. You can read more about this later in the newsletter.

Lastly, as we navigate through an unprecedented situation with coronavirus disease presenting worldwide challenges, I would advise those at risk to consider the best options for your individual safety – and to have an emergency plan in place should you need one.

Stay safe and well,
Serena

Options for Dealing With Coronavirus Disease

As coronavirus disease begins to affect the Australian community, PDCN has been assessing how we work in this environment, and will do our utmost to keep staff and our members safe and well – acknowledging that for many people with disability being exposed to coronavirus can be a significant risk for their health and safety.

To this end, we have put a hold on community events and face-to-face peer meetings, however we are assessing alternate options and will endeavour to provide online or phone options for linking and supporting people during this time. It is likely our team will move to working offsite but we will do our utmost to keep you informed of changes and minimise disruptions to our services.

To assist you we've prepared some general information below, taken from reliable, accurate sources - and links to where you can obtain more should you need further advice or assistance. We'll also be posting regular updates on our social media channels (Facebook & Twitter) as changes come into play. Please note that the information in this article was current as of 18 March 2020. As the situation is developing quickly, we strongly advise that members refer to the links below for the most current advice possible.

The Australian Health Protection Principle Committee (AHPPC) released a statement on 17 March advising that the Australian Government's principle national objective is to slow

progression of the coronavirus disease outbreak through social distancing measures. It is anticipated that these measures may have to last for six months or more. There are currently restrictions on large gatherings of people, meetings or conferences for critical workforce members, and visits to vulnerable groups. To read the most up-to-date statement from the AHPPC, or learn more about restrictions on gatherings and visits to vulnerable groups, visit www.health.gov.au. The situation is changing rapidly, and it is important to remain up-to-date on the latest developments and strategies.

The Department of Health also has general information about coronavirus disease, including how to protect yourself, a list of symptoms, and what to do if you believe you are infected – www.health.gov.au/news.

A 24-hour, 7 day a week Coronavirus Health Information Hotline is also available to call on 1800 020 080 (call 131 450 if you need an interpreter).

At the simplest level – to help prevent the spread of coronavirus disease you should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, including before and after eating, and after going to the toilet;
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and wash your hands; and
- avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people whenever possible).

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses.

If you require assistance in a medical emergency please dial 000

Access to essentials (food, toilet paper, etc)

A number of major supermarket retailers, including Coles, Woolworths and IGA, are now providing specific hours when people with disability can shop and are prioritising online shopping services for persons with disability.

www.coles.com.au or call 1800 061 562

www.woolworths.com.au or call 1300 767 969

Financial Services

Services Australia has produced information for people receiving government benefits:

www.servicesaustralia.gov.au.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Information for NDIS participants on changes including service delivery including and variations to support service needs, can be found at www.ndis.gov.au or by calling their info line 1800 800 110.

Expression Australia (for those who are deaf or hearing impaired) is providing regular updates on developments as well as health information: www.expression.com.au.

As previously mentioned, information is changing daily, so to keep you up-to-date, PDCN will post regular updates via Facebook and Twitter.

Disability Inclusion Act Consultation



On 11 March PCDN convened two forums at Parliament House for people with disability to discuss the practical workings of the Disability Inclusion Act, in light of the review of the Act currently being carried out by the NSW Government. This was a joint consultation with Spinal Cord Injuries Australia, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and Stroke Recovery Association. We will use the feedback gained from these forums to inform our submissions to the current review.

The Disability Inclusion Act is the key piece of legislation that formally commits NSW to the principles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability. The purpose of the Act is to promote the accessibility of mainstream services and facilities for persons with disability, to facilitate community inclusion, and to provide funding, support and services. The Act requires NSW to develop a plan to achieve these aims, and also directs public services and Local Government Agencies to develop their own specific plans – Disability Inclusion Action Plans (DIAPs) – to improve accessibility of services and overall inclusion.

Some key observations coming from the forums were:

- A number of forum participants did not realise that there was a Disability Inclusion Act;
- Attendees were generally satisfied with the rights the Act gave to persons with disability but pointed out that there is currently no ability to enforce those rights;
- Attendees knew that councils and government departments had Disability Inclusion Action Plans but felt that their voices as persons with disability were not being incorporated into their development and implementation.

The forums were a great success, and there was really robust discussion that we will be incorporating into our submission. We'd like to express our thanks to all participants for their time and effort in attending, and we hope that the event was as worthwhile for attendees as it was for us.

If you would like to read more about the Disability Inclusion Act and have your say on the review you can visit the Department of Communities & Justice website at www.facs.nsw.gov.au/inclusion/disability/review-of-the-disability-inclusion-act.

New ILC Grant Enables Expanded Peer Support

PDCN is delighted to be the recipient of a new round of Information Linkages & Capacity Building (ILC) funding from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The new ILC funding gives us the ability to develop and deliver a three-year project working with people with disability to build on their capacity, resilience and rights. The project has also provided opportunities for three new employees, two of whom have disability, to join us in March and April 2020. Look out for an introduction to the new employees in subsequent newsletters.

The new ILC funding means we will be able to continue and build on our current peer support groups as well as introducing new groups in the second and third year of the project. An increase in peer-to-peer mentoring and individual support will also be available providing a structured and supportive environment to assist individuals in building or clarifying goals, or in increasing individual understanding of the NDIS. We will continue to work with existing partners in the peer support and mentoring space and will be looking for opportunities to develop new partnerships.



We will also be developing and presenting a suite of workshops. The number of NDIS Self-Management Workshops currently available will increase and we will also be delivering alternate NDIS workshops as required. Workshops on building resilience and confidently advocating for one's rights will also be developed and delivered by the new project team.

The rollout of the new project is scheduled for July 2020 however the recent coronavirus pandemic will see us providing alternate ways of connecting and offering support such as delivering peer support groups, individual support and components of the workshops via phone or video conferencing.

If you would like to know more about the project, please contact Wendy Banfield, Education and Operations Manager, on 1800 688 831.

Simone Stanford | Board Member Profile



What attracted you to the position on the PDCN board?

I came across a stand advertising PDCN at a Disability Expo in 2017 and after speaking to Serena, our Executive Officer, about what PDCN did, felt it was an organisation I wanted to be involved in, so I signed up as a member. I'd been in a wheelchair almost four decades but really had no idea that advocacy organisations were working tirelessly and quietly behind the scenes to support and improve the lives of people such as myself with a disability. I wanted to be a part of this organisation so the following year I nominated and was accepted on to the board.

Where do you feel you can add the most value to PDCN in your role as a Board member?

Having spent the majority of my professional life overseeing the finances of our own business as well as working in a voluntary capacity as Treasurer on the board of another not-for-profit organisation for a number of years I volunteered for the position of Treasurer on the PDCN Board as I felt it was where I could add most value. I also feel I bring to the board the perspective of a female with a disability having lived through years when taxis, trains and buses weren't accessible; where disabled access to public buildings wasn't considered a high priority and where disabled toilets, disabled car parking spaces or accessible seating just didn't exist. I've seen the changes that can be made in society through the work of organisations like PDCN.

What do you see as the most important issues for PDCN/or the disability sector currently?

For PDCN, maintaining our government financial support is crucial for our existence so we can continue to make positive changes in our society through advocacy in the disability space. In the disability sector ironing out all the teething problems with the NDIS I see as an important issue.

Tell us about other things that interest you outside of the disability sector.

Family is the most important aspect of my life, so my thoughts, time and activities are spent with them. I have an amazing husband and a beautiful married daughter and son in law who have generously provided me with two grandchildren to dote on. I really enjoy attending live music of all types from classical through to country and lastly, I love spending time cooking with my husband.

Making Democracy Accessible

PDCN, along with various other disability advocacy services, recently met with representatives of the Australian and NSW Electoral Commissions to discuss the accessibility of the electoral system for people with disability. This meeting looks like it will become part of an ongoing dialogue with both Commissions. Access to the democratic process is a fundamental right, and both the State and Federal Commissions have acknowledged this through the development of Disability Access Plans (DAPs). One of the key functions of DAPs is to develop practical strategies to remove barriers to accessing government services and employment, and to generally promote the rights of people with disability.

We reflected on State and Federal strategies around various accessibility issues, including physical access to polling centres and the process of lodging ballot papers. Technologies discussed included iVote, the use of Auslan interpreters at polling booths and via Facebook Live, the recent upgrades to the NSW Electoral Commission website and the use of braille ballot papers. One issue that remains problematic is any requirement for candidates to provide voting information in accessible formats. There are currently no statutory requirements for candidates to provide these resources in multiple formats.

The next upcoming election is the NSW Local Government election scheduled for 12 September 2020. Important information about this election includes the following:

- iVote will not be available for the 12 September election;
- Telephone assisted voting will not be available;
- Two Local Government Areas (Penrith and Fairfield) have opted to use private contractors to run their polling. This may mean that the accessibility standards of these LGAs may differ to other LGAs, although it is expected that they comply with the legislation which specifies that accessibility must be considered;
- If you require a braille ballot paper, these must be ordered in advance by no later than 3 August 2020 by calling 1300 135 736. These can be posted to your home or can be provided to you on election day at a specified polling booth;
- Auslan interpreters will be available at all polling venues;
- Interpreters will be available at all polling venues via TIS. You can find more information on elections in languages other than English on the NSW Electoral Commission website;
- Details of accessible polling venues will be available on the NSW Electoral Commission website.

We are interested in hearing your thoughts and experiences regarding access and technologies like iVote at previous elections. Please email us at admin@pdcnsw.org.au or call on 1800 688 831 and ask to speak with Hayley Stone, Senior Policy Officer.

PDCN is coming to the end of its three-year strategic plan, and it's time to start thinking about what the organisation's focus will be across 2020-2023. As members, your input in this process is vital to making sure that we provide a strong voice for people with physical disability across NSW.

You will receive an email link to our online survey over the next week. The survey aims to do two things – firstly, we are keen to learn more about you as a member of PCDN, so that we can focus our work on issues that are most relevant to our community as a whole. And secondly, we are asking you to identify what strategic focuses are most important to you.

The data that we receive will direct our strategic advocacy efforts over the next three years and will allow us to target our efforts towards achieving positive change for people with disability. If you would like to have more involvement in the policy work that we do, you can also nominate to provide your contact details on the survey. All the information you provide will be anonymised in order to protect your privacy.

If you are unable to access the survey online and would prefer to complete it in a different format, please contact Hayley Stone on 1800 688 831 or hayley.stone@pcdns.org.au.

We look forward to learning more about you as a member and understanding which systemic issues have the most impact on your life.



Website - www.pdcnsw.org.au



I'm Okay - www.imokay.org.au



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