



Serena Ovens
Chief Executive Officer

As I write this introduction from my home office, I'm led to reflect on a very different three months for PDCN than we've ever experienced.

I am proud to say that the team has stepped up to the challenges that coronavirus has thrust upon us, managing to not only do their

usual work and projects whilst working from home, but also taking on more than their usual workloads.

I hope PDCN members have enjoyed receiving regular calls from our team. I know that from our end it was a pleasure to get to know more about our more regional members in particular through these calls, and we hope you've found them useful and worthwhile too.

It has been a challenging time for many, with loss of income, increased living costs and having to self-isolate for health reasons being a significant factor for some people with disability. Knowing this, in April PDCN put out a Coronavirus Position Statement on the six major areas of concern we saw as affecting our members. We have spent much of the past three months advocating on your behalf for these to be addressed. We've had some success, and are still working on others, but you can read more around the specifics of our demands later in the newsletter.

As July rolls on the team will continue gradually transitioning back to work in the Glebe office, but please know that no matter where we are, we're still available for anything you may need. Just call, email, or contact us in any way that best suits you!

Serena

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Our Strategic Plan for the Next Three Years

The PDCN Board, guided by invaluable input from staff, PDCN members and other stakeholders, has spent quality time in the first half of this year reviewing our strategic priorities and setting a new strategic plan for the upcoming three years - not an easy task when surety of funding is still a long way off!

It's clear from much of the feedback we received that people value the work that we do, and the voice we provide to our members in the wider community. But we still feel we can do better, particularly in achieving long-term change for our members.

To that end we've identified a number of proactive systemic advocacy projects that we will focus more of our time on over the next three years (or however long it takes!) to really push for broad change that will make a concerted difference to the lives and inclusion of our members, and all people with physical disability.

We want to champion nationally consistent road rules for motorised and personal mobility devices; we're also focused on working with NSW Health to develop a disability specific admission care plan, ensuring all disability specific needs are met during any hospital stay; and are looking to work with Local Governments to mandate a higher standard of accessibility in new housing builds. None of these projects are simple, all will take time and effort, but we're committed to pushing forward and achieving some very real outcomes for our members.

As previously mentioned, funding for PDCN is still in limbo. Our strategic plan allows us to divert some of our efforts towards attracting partners and sponsors from outside of government, to assist in remaining a sustainable organisation and in supporting the vital work that we do.

We will also still provide information and education opportunities. The major ILC grant we successfully attained in February gives us the ability to achieve individual capacity building outcomes for people with disability through a suite of workshops, peer groups or one-on-one individual support sessions. You can read more on these in detail later in the newsletter.

Providing expert, accurate commentary on the issues that affect your lives is paramount, both in communications to members, and in our dealings with government and the broader community, and this too remains a key strategy for the upcoming years.

Find out more about our Strategic Plan for 2020-23 at www.pdcnsw.org.au/strategic-plan.



Rights, Resilience and Peer Support

As mentioned in our March newsletter, PDCN have been the recipients of a new round of NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) funding. We have now employed an ILC team and welcome Adrian and Heidi into the roles of peer facilitator/mentor, and Bridget into the project officer role. Wendy will also work in a facilitator/mentor role and as the project manager.



The new funding will allow us to offer a more extensive range of capacity building activities which include a series of workshops, peer support groups and individual peer support.

The workshops on offer include:

- Rights (self-advocacy)
- Resilience
- NDIS self-management
- General NDIS Information

Most of the existing peer groups will be continuing and we will be establishing an Inner West peer group in the next couple of months. Peer groups and individual peer support can cover a broad variety of topics, including:

- Information on the NDIS
- Self-advocacy, assertiveness, and your rights
- Resilience during and beyond coronavirus
- Enhancing independence and practical living skills
- Managing relationships
- Accessing your community and travelling
- Using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom
- And many more!

All activities will be available online whilst physical distancing continues. Once we are past physical distancing, we are looking to offer a range of online and face-to-face activities.

If you would like to find out more, please email bridget@pdcnsw.org.au.

Rex Betar | Board Member Profile

What attracted you to the position on the PDCN board?

With the inception of the NDIS there seems to be a perception in society that most disability issues are now solved. But 90% of people with disability aren't on the NDIS. People with disability are anywhere between two times and five times more likely to be unemployed than the general population, and there is a swathe of accessibility issues across NSW. Advocacy is crucially important to ensure governments and society are having these conversations.

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

Having cerebral palsy my whole life allows me to deeply understand many of the issues facing people with disability, and often gives me first-hand experience in those issues. It is crucial we remain a member-focussed organisation.

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

There are so many! Two that stand out are the need for a long-term commitment to funding from government, which in turn requires government to have a better understanding of the issues people with disability face in NSW. The second would be access to public spaces, particularly transport. The NSW train network is way behind global standards. Lifts in every station would be a great start.

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

I'm a proud father of (soon to be) two boys, I enjoy lots of Greek food and I'm a long-suffering Waratahs fan.



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Point to Point Transport and Proactive Advocacy

While the coronavirus pandemic has kept us busy for the past few months, the Policy Team has still found time for our broader systemic work, most recently in the area of point to point transport, which covers taxis and ride share companies such as Uber.

We recently made submissions to two reviews of the point to point transport industry. The first, an independent review for Transport for NSW, and the second was to Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into the Operation of the Point to Point Transport (Taxi and Hire Vehicles) Act 2016. The focus of our submissions was on the user experience, and how recent changes to the point to point industry have (or haven't) benefited people with physical disability.

Our recommendations included the following:

- The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) should be available as an electronic smart card-based system;
- Transport for NSW should expand the TTSS to enable subsidies to be available for use on any point to point transport journey;
- The requirement for paper-based Interstate Travel Vouchers should be replaced with a smart card system which allows for TTSS subsidies to be applied throughout Australia under reciprocal arrangements between the States and Territories;
- Access to the interest free loan scheme, free licences and the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) Disability Incentive and Subsidies should be expanded to drive share providers and community transport operators;
- All of industry disability awareness training should be rolled out and clear expected service standards in compliance with anti-discrimination legislation be mandated;
- Transport for NSW should provide an Opal transfer discount or allowance for fares that include a transfer between point to point transport and public transport.

In addition, the Policy Team have decided upon a number of proactive advocacy projects based on priorities identified by members. These include health, accessible spaces, and accessible housing.

Our aim is for:

- All urban Local Government Areas to mandate gold standard accessibility in new residential builds under their Local Strategic Planning Statement
- NSW Health to have a disability specific admission plan that identifies an individual's disability care needs during a hospital stay (particularly if these are not related to the reason for hospitalisation)
- All Ticketek online bookings to allow for booking of accessible seating.

We will continue to work to ensure the voice of our members is represented through the varied advisory bodies and committees on which we sit, such as accessible public transport, motorised mobility devices, energy and water, health, ageing, electoral issues and disability inclusion planning.

Coronavirus: Equitable Treatment for All?

Since the release of our official Coronavirus Statement in April, we have been working diligently to address its six key demands with all levels of government. We have made good progress, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that the voices of people with disability are not sidelined during this pandemic.

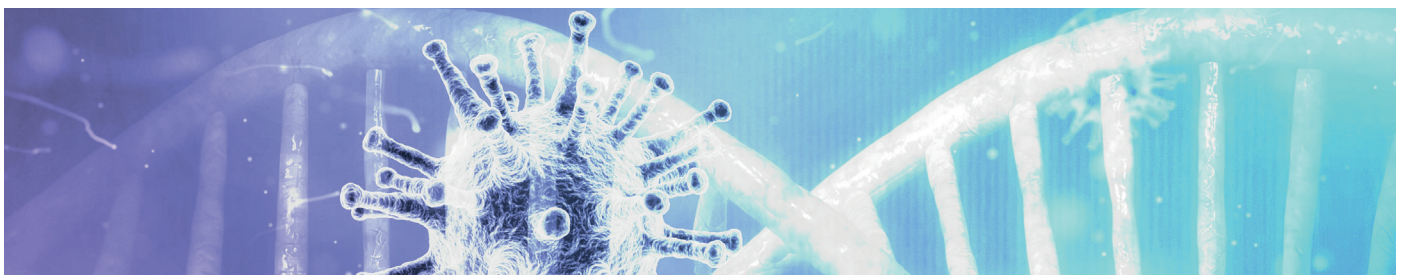
Key to achieving this is a requirement that the NSW Government commit to funding for disability advocacy organisations beyond December 2020, yet to date they have unfortunately not done so. PDCN will continue to work with the government to ensure a long-term funding commitment. Stay tuned as we once again ramp up the NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance #StandByMe campaign.

The lack of consultation on ethical allocation of intensive care resources (e.g. ventilators) has been an alarming hallmark of the pandemic response in many countries; hence we are pleased to be working with NSW Health as they prepare a NSW protocol on the ethical allocation of ICU resources. We are quietly confident that the final protocol will be equitable for all.

One of the most immediate and harmful problems faced by people with disability during the pandemic has been extremely unreliable access to essentials such as food, medicine, and personal protective equipment (PPE). The change allowing NDIS participants to access PPE from the National Medical Stockpile was a positive development, but we are still fighting to obtain similar access for people with disability who are not on the NDIS. We are presently awaiting a response from NSW Health on this issue. We have also raised the problems with supply lines and delivery with both sides of NSW politics, and will continue to give voice to the stories of people affected by these avoidable problems. Please reach out to us if you have a story that you would like to share.

The Federal Government has pushed back very strongly against community demands to expand the Coronavirus Supplement to recipients of the Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment and Carer Allowance. Therefore, we have developed a new strategy to tackle the increased cost of living for people on the DSP and Carer Payments, which we feel is more likely to gain support. We will be putting this to the Federal Minister for Families and Social Services Anne Ruston in the near future, having already discussed it with Federal Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese's office.

We will continue to keep you posted on further outcomes and work in this area.



Disability Advocacy Funding Still Under Threat



As the 2019-20 financial year rolls to an end we are truly disappointed to say that we are no closer to a final resolution to securing long-term funding for disability advocacy organisations in NSW.

Having received the recommendations from the NSW Disability Commissioner's Advocacy Review in December last year, we are also yet to hear from the NSW Government on its acceptance, or otherwise, of the recommendations.

The NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance are, on the whole, in favour of the Commissioner's recommendations. We provided the Minister for Disability with our position statement in April, at his request,

and asked that the Minister advise how he would be working with us to implement the recommendations.

In response all the Alliance has received is a letter outlining his inability to do anything further until the NSW budget has been handed down in October or November, and an extension of funding until 31 December this year.

This of course is extremely concerning, as we cannot see how a total reform of the disability advocacy sector can be managed in less than a month between the budget and the end of the year, when the current funding extension runs out. This leaves the 39 affected organisations in a perilous position, for both staff and the people with disability they support.

This means we'll be ramping up the Stand By Me campaign in the next months and looking to you, our members and supporters, to once again get vocal and let the government know of the importance of organisations such as ours in building an inclusive society, and providing a voice for people with disability.

We want to ensure any changes to the sector result in increased access and inclusion for people living with disability in NSW and are capable of meeting the level of demand we currently need to meet. That's why we're calling for a full year's rollover of the current funding at a minimum. We're also asking to be included in the implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations, and for there to be full collaboration on the building of an outcomes framework for the sector. Keep your eyes on our social media sites over the coming weeks, as we'll once again be asking our supporters to take up the call for secured, long-term funding for the NSW disability advocacy sector.

At last November's AGM we put forward a resolution to provide ongoing free PDCN membership for all people with disability and their representatives (where the person with a disability is under 16) which was passed unanimously. This means that if you are currently registered as a full PDCN member, you will never have to renew or pay any membership fees again. We will renew your PDCN membership automatically each year, unless you request that we cancel it. This will also apply to any new members with a disability who join our organisation.

Associate members, businesses and non-profit organisations will pay their usual yearly membership amount when membership renewal falls due at the start of each financial year. Anyone in these categories will have recently received a membership renewal email with a link to make payment online. All you need is a debit or credit card.

We encourage all current members to reach out to friends, family and business associates and ask them to support PDCN's work by becoming a member. Membership provides an easy channel for you to contact us about systemic issues and problems you might experience, in turn informing our feedback to government via the various advisory committees we sit on. We also consider the issues you raise when determining our proactive priorities and strategic plan.

Find out more at www.pdcnsw.org.au/membership.



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