



Serena Ovens
Chief Executive Officer

What a year!

2020 has definitely been one for the record books in so many ways. On a positive note, the November NSW budget finally saw the announcement of long-term funding for disability advocacy, to which we breathed a huge sigh of relief! We also successfully completed both ILC grant projects in line with our contracted obligations, even with complications from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We were also successful at obtaining a \$2M grant to continue our peer connections work, which is aimed at building the capacity, skills and confidence of people with physical disability to be included as members of the community and speak up for ourselves. We began rolling out this new grant in February, delivering peer groups, peer-to-peer mentoring, and workshops for people with disability. This grant will run until February 2023 – so please check out our website if you are interested in finding out more.

Last month we also received news that we had been successful in obtaining funds through a private trust for vital equipment for some of our members, which was fabulous news. This will no doubt make a huge difference for those who had requested support to purchase much needed equipment.

COVID-19 of course dominated our year, as I'm sure it did yours. For us it meant pivoting our services to online options, working from home, and even bringing in new staff whilst under restrictions - not an easy task. I have to congratulate the team, who took on the challenges without a complaint (in fact, I think I may have trouble getting them to come back to the PDCN offices!)

continued on next page

In this issue:

- 3 Relief At Last**
NSW Government funds disability advocacy services
- 4 Building Back Better**
Towards a disability-inclusive post COVID-19 world
- 5 Board Member Profile**
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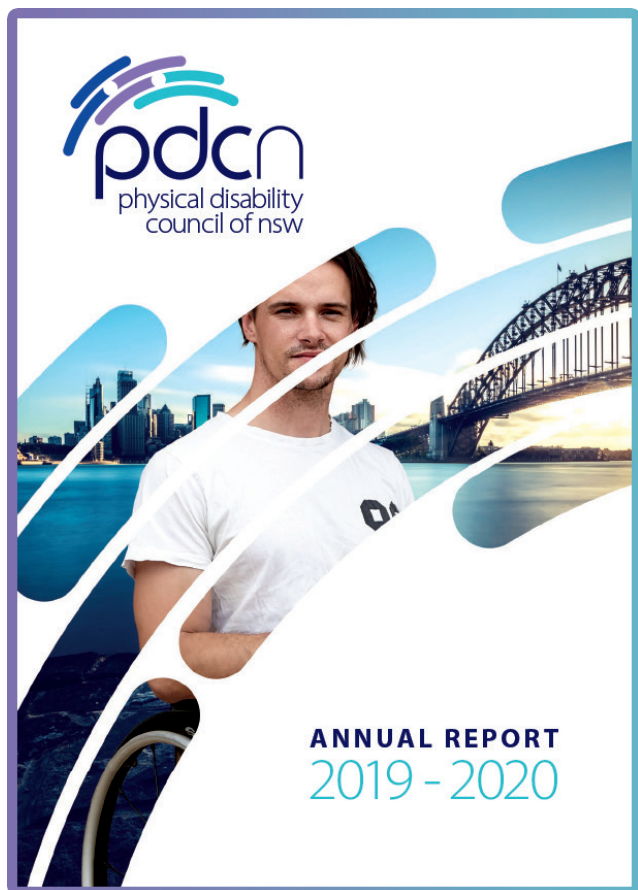
We worked hard to secure better outcomes for people with disability during this time and had some good wins. NSW Health implemented an ethical framework to ensure people with disability are equally considered in the allocation of ICU resources should demand outweigh supply; we also advocated successfully for allowing people to access critical supplies of PPE when it became impossible to purchase from the usual channels.

I believe COVID-19 brought us even closer to our members than ever before. With the implementation of regular check in calls, the team commented on how nice it was to actually speak to many members we don't often get to see or engage directly with, and to get to know them a little better. We hope you found these calls useful too!

Included with this newsletter is our 2019-20 Annual Report, so rather than go into great depth about all we've achieved this year, I'll leave it to you to read the report at your leisure.

I wish everyone a safe, happy, and healthy Christmas, Hanukkah or holiday, however you choose to celebrate it. And I look forward to some much-needed downtime over the holiday period to recharge and be back working for a fully inclusive NSW in the new year.

Take Care,
Serena



Annual Report Enclosed

Please find enclosed with this newsletter a copy of our Annual Report for 2019-2020. Have a read to discover more about our objectives, the work we've been doing to meet those objectives, and our strategic plan for the next three years.

Relief! NSW Government Funds Disability Advocacy Services!



It is a huge pleasure and an immense relief to have had the Minister for Disability Services Gareth Ward announce the inclusion of \$112 million in the NSW budget for the provision of disability advocacy and inclusion services for the next four years, beginning from June 2021. This came about after more than three and a half years of constant campaigning, rallying and lobbying. We received tens of thousands of signatories to our petition, sent thousands of emails and letters, and visited local MPs, telling our story to all who would listen.

Of this funding approximately \$13 million per year will be used for funding advocacy, an amount that is roughly in line with the Ageing and Disability Commissioner's Advocacy review recommendations in 2019.

There's still a lot to be worked out as the sector transitions to what has been coined the Disability Advocacy Futures Program. This will include setting out a new outcomes framework to ensure that services provide people with disability with the outcomes they need, finalising the structure of this new program, then being commissioned to deliver the services within it.

To this end the steering committee of the NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance have set up a working group with the Department of Communities and Justice Disability Policy team, to collaborate and co-design the new program and the steps to implementation. Early indications suggest that there will be a two-year process before we transition fully.

We will keep you posted as further details come to hand, but for now we end the year knowing that people with disability will have long-term access to the vital advocacy, information, and representation they need. This is a huge win for us all.

To everyone, from the organisations in the Alliance, to our members, families and other stakeholders who stood beside us in our call for funding, tirelessly putting your voice and actions behind the Stand By Me campaign, we offer our deepest thanks for your support – it truly made all the difference!



Telehealth, working from home, essentials delivery services, online social events... How do we retain these things in a post COVID-19 world? One positive outcome of the pandemic has been that physical distancing restrictions have forced people to rethink many of the day-to-day activities that can be challenging for people with disability. We have seen that with enough incentive, both the private and public sector can adapt entrenched policies and procedures with surprising speed and flexibility.

Fittingly, the theme for this year's International Day of People with Disability on 3 December was ***"Building Back Better: toward a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world"***. And so, to celebrate IDPWD, we hosted the Building Back Better Forum to discuss what a post COVID-19 future should look like, and to focus on some positives out of this difficult and challenging year. We invited a broad range of participants, including people with physical disability, advocates from the disability sector, representation from NSW Health, and the Minister for Disability Services Gareth Ward.

Panellists were asked to discuss the key initiatives they have seen during the pandemic which enhanced the lives of people with disability, and what they would like to see incorporated into everyday life.

The main positive themes to emerge were stronger partnerships both within the disability sector, and between the sector and government; greater government consultation with people with disability; online platforms such as telehealth; and the capacity to work and study from home.

Our sincere thanks to all who attended, to the panellists for their thoughtful and candid insights, and to Disability Discrimination Commissioner Dr Ben Gauntlett for his keynote opening address. We hope that the Forum was informative and inspirational, providing a positive end to a very challenging year for our community! If you would like to watch the full video, you can find it on our Facebook page at facebook.com/PDCNSW/videos.

Mary Flanagan | Board Member Profile

What attracted you to the position on the PDCN Board?

I was looking for an opportunity to volunteer my time to a community organisation. I knew PDCN to be a dynamic advocacy organisation that achieves an impressive amount with limited resources.

I strongly believe in PDCN's mission and the powerful voice it provides to its members to achieve system-wide change. When a board position became available, I was delighted to have the opportunity to apply.

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

I have practised as a lawyer for four years in public interest law and three years in commercial law. I think I can use my skills and experience to contribute to the Board's decision making on issues concerning risk management, compliance, strategic planning, and opportunities for strategic litigation to achieve PDCN's goals.


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

One of the ongoing challenges we face is protecting PDCN's core government funding. In recent years, government funding for advocacy by independent civil society groups has come under increasing pressure. There have been some positive developments recently, but we must continue to convince our public representatives that the work of advocacy organisations such as PDCN is vital to our democracy to ensure that policy decisions are inclusive and the interests of those who may otherwise be excluded are represented.

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

In my free time, my two great loves are pasta and history! On the weekend, I love to get into the ocean and when it's too cold, I'm happy if I can at least get out for a walk near the ocean.





The Staff and Board
of PDCN wish everyone a
Merry Christmas and a very
safe, happy and healthy
New Year!

Our office will be closed from Friday 25 December
and will reopen on Monday 4 January.



Website - www.pdcnsw.org.au



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



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