



Serena Ovens
Chief Executive Officer

Dear PDCN members,

It seems like every time I write an introduction for one of our newsletters there's another extraordinary event taking place that has a devastating effect on some, if not all, of PDCN's membership – and sadly, this edition is no different.

Just as we feel like we may be getting on top of all things COVID-related, a significant percentage of NSW has experienced the very worst flooding on record.

We know that for some of our membership this has meant the loss of homes and everything they own, and in cases where that also includes the loss of expensive, specifically prescribed equipment, the process to replace these items is neither simple nor speedy.

We are doing what we can from here, providing information on where to get financial assistance, how to deal with insurers, linking with the NDIS if replacement equipment is needed, and more. We have also spoken both to the media and the new NSW Disability Minister about ensuring that people with disability are prioritised in the recovery process – and to be thinking in the rebuild about making homes accessible. So much more stock is going to be needed to meet demand, and it makes NO sense whatsoever to keep building inaccessible housing that neither meets the needs of buyer or renters alike; those with disability, those looking to age in place, or young families.

We are also adding our voice to the calls to act now on

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climate change. Whilst not a disability specific issue, the effects of climate change on the world in which we live are greater for people with disability, and as a nation we need to address this now.

Finally, as I write this, it is also becoming clear that COVID cases are once again on the rise, as a new highly transmissible variant of Omicron hits the streets. I urge you to once more take whatever precautions you need to in order to keep yourselves and those around you safe and well.

Take care
Serena

Funding Update



As our members will have already heard, PDCN has successfully tendered to provide systemic advocacy funding for people with physical disability under the new Disability Advocacy Futures Program.

This initial funding is for a two-and-a-half-year period until June 2024, and we hope that after this time any further funding will be for five-year periods.

The good news is that we have also been given slightly more funds than were previously allocated. This has allowed us to employ an additional full-time staff member in our policy team, and as such we welcome Alice Batchelor to the role at the end of this month. There is also some additional funding support for communications and membership stewardship.

In terms of what PDCN will do for the funding, we will continue to do what we do best – advocate for the full participation of people with physical disability in NSW community! This involves representation on numerous advisory committees, ensuring the needs and expectations of our members are met, along with written submissions on improvements to

legislation, standards, policies and procedures to address inadequacies of these to support the full equity and access of people with a physical disability.

In addition to what we've always done we have committed to two new projects. Firstly, we will produce a yearly research report on a specifically identified area of need, highlighting the impact on our members and others with physical disability. And secondly, we will establish an advisory committee of members to assist in ensuring that the work we do is driven by members' input and priorities. The committee will also provide us with a go-to group of self-advocates, who can provide that much needed voice of experience in our communications to government, the media and the wider community. There's a bit of work to be done to establish this group, but we encourage you to keep an eye out as we do so, as we will call on you to nominate if you would like to be a part of this initiative.

Of course, we won't just be relying on this group as our only source of information. We will continue to provide regular opportunities for all of our members to engage - through surveys, phone calls and consultations - and we hope that soon we can actually get out and about to meet with you all face to face once again. We will still run online events to ensure we can reach the greatest number of people possible.

None of our work can be done without the valued input of the people we serve – YOU! So please reach out at any time to let us know what's happening for you, whether it be good or bad. We will always do our utmost to provide assistance, or support you in finding the best avenue for assistance.



Meet the New Minister For Disability Services, Natasha Maclaren-Jones

In early March PDCN had the opportunity to meet with the new Minister for Disability Services Natasha Maclaren-Jones and her team, after a Cabinet reshuffle saw previous Minister Alister Henskens move into a new portfolio.

Having built a close working relationship with Minister Henskens and his team, it was a shame to see him move on. However, we thank him, and also the disability portfolio policy staff member James Malin, for their work on behalf of our members, and wish him well in his new role.

PDCN's CEO Serena Ovens, along with PDCN Board members with physical disabilities, Michael Rabbitt and Rex Betar, were present at this meeting with Minister Maclaren-Jones, and we thank the Minister for her time, especially in a week where floods had wreaked havoc across a swath of NSW.



PDCN Board members Rex Betar and Michael Rabbitt, NSW Disability Services Minister Natasha Maclaren-Jones and PDCN CEO Serena Ovens.

We took the opportunity to get to know the Minister and to understand her priorities for the portfolio, as well as to raise our major strategic priorities for people with disability in this state. We discussed the very urgent needs of those affected by flooding, in particular the need to provide accessible accommodation for those left without housing. This led into a discussion on the crisis of accessible housing across all types of homes - social and affordable, the private market and homes for rent. We called on the Minister to urge her NSW government counterparts to sign onto the National Construction Code's mandate of Silver Level liveable design for all new housing builds. This would ensure stock across all housing options into the future.

We also discussed the need for better healthcare that meets the disability-related needs of our members during hospital stays, and transport matters – including a much shorter timeframe to addressing accessibility on our trains and railway stations.

The Minister was receptive to our requests and is keenly focused on ensuring the NDIS continues to be rolled out in the way it was initially intended, working with her state and territory counterparts to hold the Federal Government to account on this issue.

Minister Maclaren-Jones will continue to meet regularly with a group of sector representatives (PDCN is one of this group) to discuss issues of concern and move them forward on our behalf. In addition, her team are keen to work with us, and assist in linking us with the appropriate government departments as we address the equity and inclusion needs of our members.

We look forward to developing a close working relationship with Minister Maclaren-Jones as she builds her understanding and knowledge of the disability sector in NSW.

At PDCN we run free online workshops on a variety of topics such as self-advocacy, resilience and NDIS self-management.

- Are there additional topics that you'd like to see us cover?
- What type of workshop topics do you feel could help you in your life?

Our workshops are run in small groups in a safe environment, and we welcome any feedback you have at admin@pdcnsw.org.au or 1800 688 831.

Find out more on our website at www.pdcnsw.org.au/workshops.

Housing Experiences Survey Shows a Clear Need for Reform



It has been three weeks since PDCN's housing accessibility survey went live. To date we have received just shy of 60 responses which have revealed some important insights into the pitfalls and challenges people with physical disability experience when buying, renting or building a home.

The survey has allowed us to reflect on the mechanisms across all levels of government which exist to support people with physical disability to find and secure housing and whether these strategies align with the intentions of Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which provides those with disability the right to live where and with whom they choose. This is particularly relevant when we look at the limited options available to people who have significantly reduced physical capacity outside residential aged care and Specialised Disability Accommodation (SDA).

The survey also paints a clear picture of the difficulties faced by people who experience minor to moderate levels of physical disability and the compromises many people in this cohort are consistently required to make when finding a home.

These compromises are often so basic, such as being able to wash, to comfortably move between rooms, or use the bathroom without fear of slips or falls – and could be remedied

if we simply had more accessible housing stock available. Another key theme was that people with disability want to live within the communities they know and love, with their families and be able to age in place, living as independently as possible for as long as possible.

Other significant findings include that:

- 63% of all participants have modified their homes due to disability,
- 47% of respondents stated they had to move house at least once due to their accessibility requirements.
- 78% of respondents are not able to visit or stay over at family/friends' houses due to accessibility issues
- 46% of respondents paid for modifications out of their own savings
- 92% of people who had built their own home with accessibility modifications were unaware that there were pre-existing designs available to use, including the Livable Housing Design Guide.

Several of the survey participants who had transitioned into accessible homes spoke about how these homes gave them greater levels of independence, safety and access to the community. One participant discussed how ramps into and within their home had allowed them to go outside for the first time in a long time, while another discussed how their home modifications had benefitted several household members at different times. At least two participants expressed how having an accessible home was useful for other family members with physical disabilities that might come to visit.

We are excited by the quality of the data we have to date and look forward to using this information as we continue to lobby the NSW Government to incorporate the minimum accessibility standards in the National Construction Code at state level.

Many thanks go especially to Joza and Michaella, our student interns from Western Sydney University, for their work in developing the survey, promoting it, and processing the data to date. If you have not already participated in the online survey, we would be most grateful if you would take five minutes to share your thoughts with us on this important issue.

You can access the survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/Housing_Accessibility or use this QR code.



Upcoming PDCN Workshops

NDIS Self-Management

- Tuesday 29 March 1pm - 3.15pm (*Online*)
- Friday 6 May 10.15am - 2.45pm (*Face-to-Face, Orange NSW*)

Reframing Resilience

- Wednesday 27 April 1pm - 3.30pm is Part 1, followed by Part 2 on Wednesday 4 May 1pm - 3.30pm (*Online*)
- Thursday 5 May 10.15am - 2.45pm (*Face-to-Face, Orange NSW*)

Speaking Up For Yourself

- Tuesday 29 March 1pm - 3.15pm (*Online*)
- Tuesday 3 May 1pm - 3.15pm (*Online*)



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