



Serena Owens
Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to our second edition of PDCN Live for 2022. With a change of federal government just a few weeks ago, it looks like interesting times ahead. Many promises were made during the lead up to the election, and now we wait to see just what will come of these, in particular whether the Labor government can renew peoples' faith in the

NDIS, sort out the myriad of issues that currently trouble the scheme, and return our NDIS to what it was intended to be.

Having been overseas since the election, I'm a bit behind on all the workings of the new government, and it will take time to understand all the changes that this change may bring. I know that the PDCN team, ably led by our Policy Manager Hayley Stone during my leave, will be thoroughly on top of it all during my absence.

This issue also contains an in-depth look at what the policy team have been working on over the past few months, as well as a round-up of the practical side of the NSW plastics ban for people with disability.

With the end of the fiscal year fast approaching, we're also working hard to ensure all our project objectives and outcomes have been met, and are readying ourselves to begin the reporting and auditing cycle that comes around at this time of year!

We're also aware that COVID is still very much an issue in the community, and this may mean that some of our members will be once again restricting their time spent

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out and about, or in the company of others. Please reach out if you're feeling isolated or need to talk. We also recommend that you check the latest vaccination guidelines, as they've recently changed to allow more people with disability under the age of 65 who are at risk to have their fourth dose of the vaccine.

Lastly, a word of thanks to the many PDCN members who took the time to assist with some of our recent projects and consultations, especially the UTS bathrooms survey and testing, housing, and ticketing experiences. As ever your first-hand experience and insights are invaluable to PDCN and our partners, as we endeavour to improve regulations and processes for the lives of people with physical disability.

Cheers
Serena

A Busy Quarter: Income Support, Housing and Public Transport on the Policy Agenda

During the past quarter, the PDCN policy team have been busy advocating on behalf of the physical disability community of NSW on a broad range of issues including income support, housing, bus privatisation and public transport more broadly.

Firstly, our CEO Serena Ovens and Policy Manager Hayley Stone were invited to provide statements at the NSW Parliamentary inquiry into the privatisation of the Sydney metro bus services. It's hard enough to secure accessibility across state managed transport services, and we're concerned that increased privatisation will lead to less focus on customer experience and more on efficiency. While many private bus companies run excellent and inclusive services for their passengers with mobility limitations, we are aware that this is not always the case – indeed some companies have a record of seeking successful exemptions from the Australian Human Rights Commission. We recommended that any company seeking to take on a contract to run public bus services must first demonstrate existing compliance with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport.

PDCN were also invited to provide a submission to the Disability Royal Commission in a hearing convened by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO). During this hearing Serena and Hayley spoke about how the NSW public transport system still lags behind in meeting national requirements under the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport. We also stressed how critical accessible public transport is in facilitating independence and social engagement, enabling people with disability to participate in work, education and leisure.

Over the past few years we have repeatedly recommended that the NSW Government



PDCN Policy Manager Hayley Stone and CEO Serena Ovens give evidence at the at the NSW Parliamentary inquiry into the privatisation of bus services, alongside Julie Walton from Action for Public Transport (NSW).

improve the accessibility of our public transport infrastructure, particularly train stations. It's disappointing that the pace of upgrades remains painfully slow, especially when this is a major opportunity to both reenergise the economy and achieve greater inclusion for the disability community.

Later in May, Hayley attended a second Disability Royal Commission roundtable which focused on the deficiencies of the Disability Support Pension (DSP) as income support for people who are unable to work due to disability. The DSP has not seen a real increase since 2009 despite the rising costs of living. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Living Cost Index data shows that living costs for pensioner households have increased by more than 20 percent over this time, and the cost of moderate to severe disability for an individual has been analysed as being up to \$173 a week.

We expressed grave concerns that the DSP, as the main strategy Australia utilises to meet its obligation to the human rights of people with disability, does not fulfil the requirements of Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability. Applying the core elements of Article 28 - adequacy, dignity, and individual needs - requires a philosophical shift from a welfare-based to a rights-based mindset, and a rethink of how the DSP is calculated and allocated to recipients.

Hayley and our Policy and Engagement Officer Alice Batchelor also attended a disability sector consultation hosted by the Productivity Commission for its review into the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. This is an agreement between the Australian government and state and territory governments for providing housing and homelessness services. It sets out the key roles and responsibilities of each level of government to improve housing outcomes.

For the first time, the Productivity Commission is considering adding housing accessibility as a key priority area in the revised National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. We were keen to raise the challenges our members experience in finding accessible and affordable housing within their communities, and our contributions to the consultation were greatly enhanced by the data that we received from our housing accessibility survey and individual member consultations. Hayley, Alice, and our greatly valued students Michaela and Joza would like to thank all of the PDCN members who have talked to us about their housing experiences over the last few months.

Welcome Alice Batchelor to the Policy Team



Welcome to PDCN's newest team member Alice Batchelor, who joined us in late March in the new role of Policy and Engagement Officer.

Alice holds a Master's in Public and Social Policy and a Bachelor of Social Science specialising in Human Geography, which will stand her in good stead as she assists our Policy Manager Hayley Stone in working on our strategic priorities.

Having a partner who is a wheelchair user, Alice is keenly aware of the issues of access and inclusion for those living with a physical disability. She also knows basic Auslan and is eager to learn more and develop her skills in a really great and useful language.

Alice has a particular interest in how policies can affect people in their day to day lives, how physical structures and environment can subtly change peoples' lives in dramatic ways, and how we can address these issues to create a more welcoming and equitable society. She believes in a people and community centred approach to decision-making and is looking forward to collaborating with our members to create some real change!

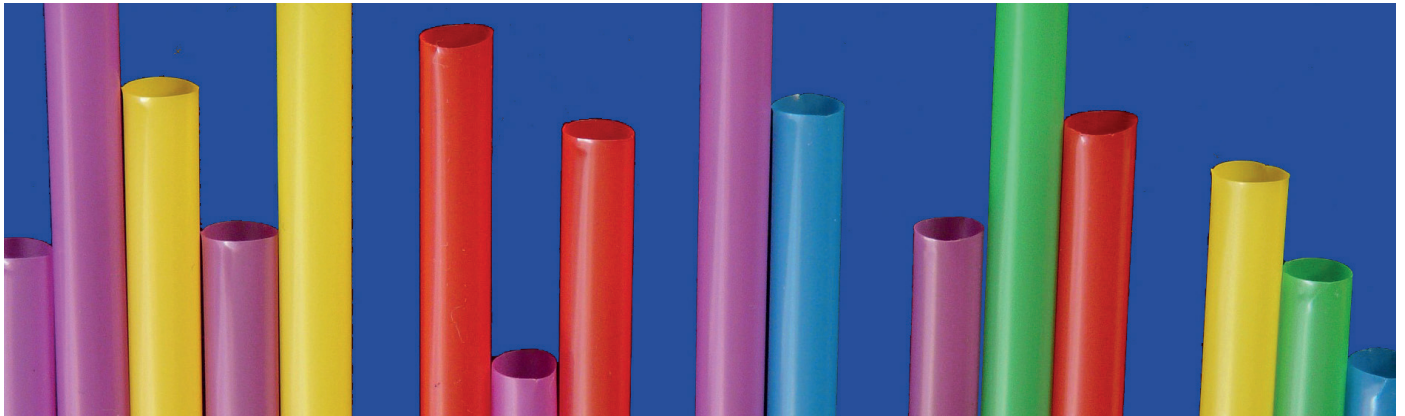
As part of this process, Alice is keen to understand more about what our members want from PDCN and will be linking with members as part of the design and establishment of an advisory group of PDCN members. This advisory group can assist us in driving our strategic agenda and providing invaluable lived experience and advice relating to the work we do. Stay tuned to hear more about this advisory group, and for an opportunity to be a founding member!

PDCN Membership Renewals

If you are an Associate, Corporate or Organisation member of PDCN it will soon be time to renew your annual membership, and so we'll soon be sending out membership renewal emails with a link that will let you easily make payment and update your details if necessary.

Full PDCN membership remains *free* for all people with physical disability and representatives of people with physical disability under 16 years old. So, if that's you, we'll automatically renew your membership and you don't need to do anything. If any of your contact details have changed in the last year please let us know by sending a quick email to admin@pdcnsw.org.au or calling us on 1800 688 831.

Plastic Straw Ban: What You Need to Know



As you are all probably aware, the NSW Government has committed to reducing all single-use plastics with a series of bans on various items happening this year. We have been involved in the development of the legislation that governs the ban of single-use plastics and have worked to ensure that the interests of our members who need to use single-use plastic straws for hydration and nutrition will be considered during the rollout of the ban.

Plastic straws will be banned from supply and distribution on 1 November this year, however people who require plastic straws for medical reasons or disability (and their carers) will continue to be able to access them in a wide range of settings and from a variety of organisations, businesses and venues. Cafes, pubs, restaurants and other venues where plastic straws are now provided will be able to stock them for the use of patrons with disabilities, but these straws will not be on public display.

Patrons (or their carers) will need to ask for plastic straws from venue staff but will *not* be required to provide proof of their disability.

It's important to note that venues are *not* obligated to stock these items under the new legislation. However, we are working with the Environmental Protection Authority and the Retail Association of Australia to strongly recommend that venues keep supplies of plastic straws available for patrons who need them, and this advice will be included in the educational materials being distributed to the retail sector.

People will still be able to buy plastic straws for their own personal use through a variety of suppliers, such as online wholesalers and manufacturers. Chemists will stock and display plastic straws as a specialised medical product. People with disabilities looking to buy straws from wholesalers and manufacturers may be required to identify that they are buying the plastic straws for disability related purposes.

We will keep members informed of our continued work in this space and any additional developments as they arise.

ATSA Independent Living Expo

The PDCN team attended the recent ATSA Independent Living Expo at the Sydney Showground in late May. It was a great opportunity to talk to many people about the work we do, and also to reconnect with the community.



VALE Jordana Goodman



It is with great sadness that we have learnt of the passing of long-time PDCN member, and former staff policy officer, Jordana Goodman. Over the past few years Jordana had struggled with declining health, and it was this that saw her leave her role in the PDCN policy team in 2017.

Prior to that time, Jordana was a strong advocate for people with disability, producing many policy submissions and sitting on numerous advisory committees across NSW government - ensuring the needs of people with physical disability were always at the forefront of any decision-making processes.

Jordana was an intelligent, independent and always positive person, and those here at PDCN who were lucky enough to work beside her valued her contributions highly. She will be sadly missed, and our thoughts are with her family at this time.