



Serena Ovens
Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to my last introduction to PDCN Live as the CEO! As many of you will know by now, I'm moving on to take up the mantle of CEO at the Assistive Technology Suppliers of Australia from July.

I leave with mixed emotions - pride for all that the PDCN team has achieved in the time that I've been at the helm, and sadness to leave an organisation that I dearly love being a part of.

I'm humbled by the words penned by the Board President Michael Rabbitt in this newsletter and am reminded that we've come a long way towards improving the lives of people with a physical disability. However, I also feel frustration that so much more is needed before we truly experience equity and full inclusion in all facets of life. I am comforted knowing that incoming CEO Edward Morris, himself a man living with disability, is fired up and ready to take the organisation to new heights as we continue to achieve our strategic objectives.

I'm not going far, and I will still be playing a part in ensuring people with disability and older people can access the technology and devices imperative to their requirements. I will definitely be staying in touch with PDCN and with all of you.

Thank you to all the PDCN staff I've worked with over the nearly nine years I've been here, and to all our members. It's been an absolute pleasure to get to know you, at times to be a voice for you, and to work to improve your lives. I'll see you at PDCN's upcoming AGM!

continued on next page

In this issue:

- 2** Welcome to new staff
- 4** Farewell Serena Ovens
- 5** Improving taxi services in NSW
- 7** Do accessible public transport standards work?
- 9** Annual NDIS conference



St Helens Community Centre
3/184 Glebe Point Road,
Glebe NSW 2037
Freecall 1800 688 831
Sydney Metro 02 9552 1606
admin@pdcnsw.org.au

As ever, please read on to hear what PDCN has been up to over the past few months. We've been doing a lot in the transport space, submitting a response to the review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport, working on a myriad of taxi-related issues, and meeting with numerous MPs, Ministers and others to address these issues on your behalf. While we haven't quite gotten there, stay tuned in the coming months for some exciting announcements around online event ticketing and our Care Passport app – these projects are nearing completion!

Signing off one final time,
Serena

Welcome to New PDCN Staff

As you will have read, I'm moving on from PDCN and want to take this opportunity to welcome CEO Edward Morris to the PDCN team.

Ed lives with disability, is driven by a social justice framework and brings a wealth of leadership experience to the role. With a background stretching across consulting, political and government sectors, he brings strong campaign management, strategic thinking and fundraising skills to the role, not to mention his lived experience of disability. I look forward to him taking PDCN to the next level!

We've also been expanding our team and you may have already had the opportunity to link with some of the fabulous new faces – but if not, then feel free to reach out soon.

Policy and Government Relations Manager Kelley Temple, an experienced policy and advocacy professional who recently worked with Community Legal Centres Australia, takes up the Policy team mantle from previous manager Hayley Stone. She has extensive experience working with governments to create inclusive change and is already up and running, showing us the amazing talent she displayed at interview.

We also welcome Annabel Smith into a new Senior Policy Officer role, adding depth to the Policy team as we grow and expand our capacity. Annabel holds a Masters in Public Policy and brings an extensive understanding of the workings of government to our not-for-profit organisation, having worked in various government departments. Having a son with disability, Annabel is passionate about building an inclusive, equitable community for our members.

Daphna Levin-Kahn has stepped into the role of Education Services Manager and will lead the ILC & Education team. Daphna brings a wealth of experience in developing educational programs and managing teams and large projects to this role. This will be hugely beneficial as we explore opportunities to develop education programs for the wider community, as well as looking to longer-term funding for the amazing capacity-building programs we currently run under the ILC project.

I wish them all the best as we continue to grow PDCN as the leading voice for people with physical disability in NSW.

Serena



Edward Morris



Kelley Temple



Annabel Smith



Daphna Levin-Kahn

Farewell Serena Ovens

As many supporters will already know, our long-term CEO Serena Ovens is heading to a new role as the CEO at Assistive Technology Suppliers Australia (ATSA). We are very sad to see her go but recognise that after eight-and-a-half years of driving the organisation and our agenda forward, a change of scene is probably much needed.

Serena has toiled with enormous energy and dedication in the cause of improving the lives of people with a physical disability. Through her passionate advocacy, her deep understanding of the issues and of the best way to pursue change, she has achieved great success on our behalf. In the process she has become one of the most respected leaders in the Australian disability landscape and her views are regularly sought by government, media, and other organisations.

One fundamental achievement resulted from her leading the fight to save disability advocacy funding in NSW when the government proposed to withdraw it. Serena drove the Stand By Me coalition of disability organisations that was successful in ensuring the ongoing survival of the sector. In the case of PDCN, the outcome was an increase in our funding and a position as the government-funded sector coordinator.

The staffing and capability of the organisation has increased significantly during Serena's time as CEO, driven by a grant from the ILC program to deliver outcomes-focused programs that develop the capacity of people with physical disability through peer groups, individual peer mentoring, workshops and consultations.

Among the many achievements of PDCN in her time as CEO was the long-running fight to get step-free access to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. After 10 years of advocacy the lifts at each end of the bridge were opened in 2018, providing 24-hour access to the pedestrian walkway.

Serena and PDCN worked with government during the pandemic to highlight issues on behalf of people living with a disability. One of the fears of many was that if intensive care was rationed, disabled people might be put to the bottom of the list. PDCN was able to ensure that NSW Health instituted an ethical protocol for the allocation of ICU resources during pandemics.



Serena and the team have also worked in the digital space, gaining NSW government agreement to develop a 'healthcare passport' app to ensure people living with a disability get the right care in NSW hospitals. We are also now seeing the addition of accessible infrastructure information, disabled parking spaces and accessibility features in the new Park'nPay app.

Serena has continued to pour enormous energy into issues such as sorting out the appalling situation with wheelchair accessible taxis, convincing the NSW government to sign up to the housing accessibility standards in the National Construction Code, working to provide online disability ticket bookings with Ticketek and ensuring NSW hand control licencing and rental vehicle issues are reformed. All of this along with regular membership of a plethora of government committees and participation in numerous one-off consultations and submissions.

On behalf of the Board, PDCN members and the broader disability community, I want to extend my thanks to Serena for the enormous amount she has achieved on our behalf. We all wish her well in her new role in the important world of assistive technology.

Michael Rabbitt
PDCN Board President

Working to Improve Our Taxi System

PDCN and Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA) had joint meetings with both the new Minister for Transport Jo Haylen and the Point to Point Transport Commissioner Anthony Wing over the past few weeks. On the agenda were the many issues with wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs) and the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) that members of both our organisations experience, and what needs to be done to improve the situation across all of NSW.

The Minister and Commissioner heard from multiple people with disabilities talking about their experiences of being overcharged, refused fares, and having to wait an average of two to three hours for wheelchair accessible taxi pickups.

PDCN CEO Serena Ovens talked about the lack of wheelchair accessible taxis on the road and problems which users face with the TTSS, particularly regarding drivers not allowing passengers to use the card payment system and the need for better driver training.

We asked Minister Haylen to introduce policy, regulation and



legislative change that provide the Point to Point Commission with teeth to enforce compliance, focusing on improving driver training and cracking down on drivers refusing fares. This would include the government paying for the integration of all booking services into the taxi dispatch system and for the TTSS to be shifted to a provider-neutral system (like the Opal card) to remove the disincentive for drivers to use it.



Minister Haylen agrees that the system is not working and was interested in hearing what levers the government can use to improve the system both in the short and longer term. Both the Minister and the Commissioner were also interested in what incentives need to be implemented to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible taxis, and make running these taxis a viable and prioritised service. The Minister advised that she has raised the concerns around the TTSS card with the Point to Point Commissioner, whilst the Commissioner himself also indicated that the current regulations prevent him enforcing compliance at some levels, as drivers are exempt from some of the current requirements.

Both initial meetings were quite positive, with all parties looking to work together to quickly address some of the simpler issues. We also aim to establish industry-wide working groups to examine the more complex issues in order to find workable solutions. We will continue to work with the Minister, Commissioner and Transport for NSW on this topic and strive to ensure that the taxi system works for people with disabilities.

Do the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Work?

The Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT) are undergoing their five-year review, and PDCN have been hard at work gathering and analysing information for a DSAPT review submission addressing what works, what doesn't, and what needs to change.

The DSAPT legislation is one of the ways that the Australian Government seeks to fulfil its commitments under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability and the Disability Discrimination Act*. The Standards cover all aspects of public transport, including trains, buses, and ferries, as well as infrastructure. They also provide a guide to public transport providers on what the government expects in terms of inclusive transport, acting as the baseline of accessibility. The aim is to minimise discrimination faced by people with disability using the public transport system.

We conducted consultations with PDCN members to gather their thoughts on the current standards, asking whether they have reduced people with disabilities' experiences of discrimination. We listened to members' opinions on the changes that need to be made to ensure public transport is accessible.

What we found is that things have gotten better, which is very welcome. However, this is to be expected as technology and infrastructure improves, with a multitude of new vehicles and infrastructure introduced to the transport system. Issues still exist in several areas, including complaints and enforcement, disability awareness training for staff, timeframes for compliance and the accessibility of information systems.



The current mechanism for enforcing accessibility standards on public transport relies on people making complaints. While complaints are an important aspect of understanding issues experienced by users, it is not adequate for a model of enforcement. Too much responsibility is placed on the user lodging a complaint, and we know not everyone will want to go through this process. Making complaints also becomes an issue in itself, as the process is not entirely clear. There is a reliance on people calling a phone number or lodging a written complaint, however none of these state that they are disability specific or how complaints will be resolved.

We want to see the introduction of an independent body to monitor standards compliance and enforce timelines and mechanisms for achieving satisfactory levels of reduced discrimination. This is to move away from the reliance on complaints in the enforcement of accessibility standards. We also want to see clearer information on how to make disability-specific complaints.

There is an obvious and ongoing need for more extensive disability awareness training for transport staff. It is important that this also extends to the use and handling of assistive technology, as this is a common complaint that we have heard.

The standards need to address the timeframes for public transport to comply with accessibility standards. The Transport Access Program, which is working on making infrastructure fully accessible, is currently 10 years behind schedule and was originally set to be completed by the end of 2022. Trains and trams have been set a 30-year timeframe to progressively become accessible. These extended and lengthy timeframes are letting people down. People need accessible transport now, and with half of people aged over 65 in Australia living with a disability, it is even more important that these changes are made soon. Our submission calls for full compliance within the next 10 years, and within five years for the Transport Access Program.

From listening to members' experiences, we also found that there is a need for better and more accessible real-time data throughout the journey. This includes access to information on lift outages, changes to routes, and making timetables available in accessible formats.

Overall, it is good to see that improvements have been made with the DSAPT in place, however there is still a long way to go before we reach a fully accessible public transport system. We need to see a stronger commitment to hitting targets and making sure existing and future infrastructure meets standards for accessibility. These are attainable goals – they just need to be realised through the DSAPT, which must hold the public transport system accountable.

You can read our DSAPT review submission in Word document format by [visiting our website](#) or scanning this QR code.



PDCN at the Annual NDIS Conference

It was exciting to come together with NDIS participants and other disability support organisations at the DCS NDIS Conference in Sydney in early June. The conference featured a range of distinguished speakers on the challenges facing the NDIS and what the future holds.

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Dr Ben Gauntlet talked about how universal design benefits all of society and emphasised the need for the NSW Government to sign on to the National Construction Code accessibility standards.

One of the most exciting sessions for us was the 'Inclusion: Rhetoric or Reality' panel hosted by Stan Grant. We were reminded that 90% of people with disabilities don't get support from the NDIS and that access to country for First Nations people with disabilities is an important part of wellbeing. Alice Patten, an Indigenous mother of a child with disability, also made a powerful case for NDIS plans having culturally safe practices factored into funding.

Senator Jordon Steele-John talked about having disability pride, which to him meant celebrating disability and how he takes the moments when he feels broken and lesser and instead places that on the societal barriers and thought processes that are disabling, in order to make change.

We welcomed hearing the NDIS Minister Bill Shorten talking about his intent to make it illegal to charge more for a product if it's being bought for an NDIS package, and we look forward to hearing more about the government's plan. Our standout quote from the Minister's speech was that he wants the NDIS 'to be safe from stupid governments for years to come'.



PDCN's Kelley Temple, Adrian O'Malley and Alice Batchelor attended the annual DSC NDIS Conference.

Upcoming PDCN Workshops

Our workshops are specifically designed for people with disability, and/or their parents, partners or family members providing unpaid support.

NDIS Self-Management

Tuesday 18 July, 10am - 12.30pm (Zoom)

Speaking Up For Yourself

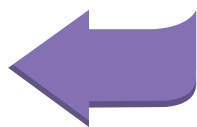
Monday 24 July, 10am - 12.15pm (Zoom)

Info Session - NDIS: What Can I Purchase?

Thursday 27 July, 10.30am - 11.30am (Zoom)



Head to www.pdcnsw.org.au/workshops or scan this QR code to find out more and register for a workshop.



Website - www.pdcnsw.org.au



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



Facebook - facebook.com/PDCNSW



Twitter - [@PDCNSW](https://twitter.com/PDCNSW)