



Southwest Advocacy News

Reg. No. A00 259 14Y

MARCH 2007

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CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Greetings to all members, clients and supporters of Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA) and welcome to another edition of our newsletter. Some of our members may have noticed that SWAA received some publicity in the Warrnambool Standard recently in relation to Australia Post's decision to improve access to the Warrnambool and Hamilton Post Offices. Australia Post's announcement represents an outcome that SWAA and the Southern Grampians Disability Support Group in Hamilton have been lobbying for for over three years. While we are pleased that these post offices will be easier for people with disabilities to get into, there are still many access problems at numerous Australia Post Offices and franchised postal agencies that need to be addressed and that SWAA will continue to advocate for. At a statewide level the Disability Rights Victoria advocacy network is also lobbying Australia Post to develop a Disability Discrimination Action Plan to address access issues across Victoria in a systematic way.

Access problems such as stepped entrances, heavy hinged doors, cluttered interior layout inside buildings, inadequate or poor signage, high customer service counters, poorly defined queuing areas and lack of awareness of the needs of people with disabilities on the part of staff,

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ARE YOU A MEMBER OF SWAA?

Why become a member of SWAA?

By becoming a member of SWAA you are demonstrating your support for an organisation that supports the rights of people with disabilities. Membership is important as it shows a broad commitment to the work of SWAA and that the organisation is valued in the community. Membership of Southwest Advocacy is absolutely free.

What does membership give me?

- ◆ As a member of SWAA you will receive an invitation to the Annual General Meeting and will be able to nominate for the Committee of Management of SWAA.
- ◆ You will be placed on our mailing list and will continue to receive our newsletter, Southwest Advocacy News, and be informed of community forums and consultations as they occur.
- ◆ You will also be counted as one of the many individuals who support the rights of people with disability in our community.

If you would like to become a member please contact Southwest Advocacy for a membership form please contact.

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are common issues encountered at so many premises, but it is important to keep trying to raise awareness and address access issues that discriminate against people with disabilities. In conjunction with the Rural Access Program, SWAA has also recently raised concerns with the Victorian Electoral Commission about access problems at voting booths, particularly the early voting booth in Warrnambool, which were brought to our attention by people with disabilities and their carers. We are hoping to meet with representatives from the Electoral Commission and to have these concerns addressed.

Problems with the accessibility of public transport is another big issue for people with disabilities. While both Government and private providers of public transport are supposed to be complying with Standards for accessibility set out under the Disability Discrimination Act, there is still a long way to go. A statewide project called Accessible Transport Watch is looking for people with disabilities to assist in gathering information about problems with public transport. Check out the information provided in this newsletter or contact us for further information.

SWAA has now been managing the Active Participation Register (APR) project in Warrnambool, Moyne and Corangamite for a few months and news items and a new APR Information Bulletin have been forwarded to Register participants as they have come to hand. The Active Participation Register provides people with disabilities with information on opportunities to get involved in consultations, planning, and decision making forums in their community. The Register currently has about 20 people listed, but we are hoping to get a lot more people with disabilities involved because we think that this is a really good way of informing and empowering people with disabilities. If you or someone that you know is interested in learning more about the project please contact us. A copy of the most recent APR Information Bulletin and an application form are enclosed for you to complete if you would like to join the project.

Robert Dick.
Co-ordinator



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via E-mail?*

If you have an e-mail address you can help us save paper & postage costs by receiving our newsletter via e-mail. Please contact Margaret on 5561 4584 or just send us an e-mail message notifying us of your email details to receive future editions of SWAA News electronically.

Plan for Victoria's Children

The families of every Victorian child with a disability need and deserve better support than what is currently available during the early childhood years.

With the Plan for Victoria's Children, families of children with a disability are expecting more than another glossy document full of nice photos and broad statements of principle.

We expect the Plan to provide practical, tangible benefits to families of children with a disability.

Key areas for action include:

Better support for parents

In addition to initiating strategies to better inform the early years workforce about parents' emotional experiences in the early years (and the implications for better professional practice), the Plan needs to provide additional tailored information and support to assist parents in understanding and dealing with emotions in the early years.

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Services

In many areas of Victoria there are long waiting lists for access to basic, core ECI services. The length of waiting times is especially acute in outer suburban growth corridors. The government should commit to eradicating ECI waiting lists by budgeting to provide access to a full and comprehensive ECI service for every Victorian family with a child with a disability from as soon as possible after a child's disability is identified.

ECIS Flexible Support Packages (FSPs)

At the time of writing, the new ECIS FSPs announced under the Fairer Victoria banner in the 2005 State Budget were at various stages of implementation. Based on positive experiences of the implementation by non-government agencies of previous FSPs, we see considerable strengths in the delivery of support to early years families via FSPs. Expansion of the number of ECIS FSPs for early years families should be a key priority in future years.

Kindergarten/Pre-school

The key program designed to assist children with a profound/severe disability to participate in kindergarten (Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services—KISS) is based on ridiculously narrow eligibility criteria.

Elsewhere within the early years and school systems, it is accepted that upwards of 3 per cent of children have a profound/severe disability, yet KISS funding is narrowly targeted to around 1 per cent of the kinder population. The narrow criteria used for KISS funding should be replaced by a more common-sense definition of profound/severe disability that promotes a positive, inclusive approach to children and families.

Home and Community Care (HACC)

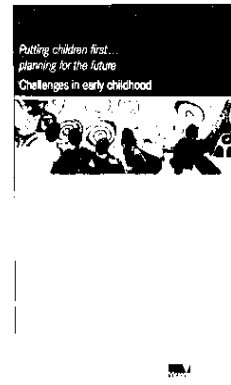
HACC services are extremely important to many Victorian families of children with a disability. The Plan needs to recognise the important role of HACC services in supporting families of children with a disability and encourage increased partnerships with local government to achieve improved access to basic HACC services for families of children with a disability in all 79 Victorian local government areas.

Turning six and the transition to school

Many children with disabilities are identified in the early years before school, as part of the ECI system. However, the school and non-school disability systems for children age 6+ invariably requires parents to negotiate another round of assessments. The Plan provides an opportunity to introduce a 'whole of government' approach to the critical transition period leading up to, and including, the year after a child with a disability turns six and becomes eligible for both school and the range of other 'age 6+' disability services and programs.

This is an edited extract from 'Children with a Disability: Some obvious solutions' which was our submission to the community consultation for the State Government's Plan for Victoria's Children.

Early years



Community consultations for the proposed new Plan for Victoria's Children took place in late 2005 and early 2006.

For updates on the progress of the Plan visit www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au.

Other early years information from the Department of Human Services (DHS) is available from www.dhs.vic.gov.au/earlychildhood.

Taken from Magazine of the Association for Children with a Disability—Noticeboard—July 2006

DE&T Disability Action Plan

As part of the State Government's commitment to making public services more accessible to people with a disability as outlined in A Fairer Victoria and the State Disability Plan 2002-2012, Victorian Departments will be required to develop a Disability Action Plan.

The Department of education and Training (DE&T) has released its Disability action Plan 2005-2008 which outlines six outcome areas and strategies including: employment; consultation and decision-making processes; staff awareness and understanding of the needs of people with a disability; accessible information and communication processes; accessible programs and services and improved physical access to buildings and facilities.

Our Association provided feedback on the draft Plan which was incorporated into Outcome 5: Accessible information and communication processes.

For copies of the Plan contact DE&T's Human Resources Department on 1800 641 943 or visit www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/hrweb/diversity and look under Equal Opportunity.

Taken from Magazine of the Association for Children with a Disability—Noticeboard-July 2006

Making Transport More Affordable

The Multi Purpose Taxi Program makes transport more accessible for Victorians with a severe and permanent disability by giving members half price taxi fares, to a maximum discount of \$30 per trip.

It is important to make sure that the Multi Purpose Taxi Program is helping people who most need it. Membership is available for people who:

- . Permanently live in Victoria and
- . Have a severe and permanent disability; and
- . Have a disability which prevents their using public transport by themselves.

The also need to either:

- . Permanently use a wheelchair; or
- . Hold a Department of Veterans' Affairs Pensioner Concession Card or gold Repatriation Health Card; or
- . Hold certain means-tested Pensioner Concession or Health Care Cards issued by Centrelink; or
- . be able to show they have financial hardship by providing financial information.

From 10 September 2005 the yearly subsidy limit has been raised to **\$1,000** from \$565 and the maximum discount per trip has increased to **\$30** from, \$25 from Multi purpose Taxi Program members.

Members don't have the yearly limit if they:

- . Are permanently in a wheelchair;
- . Have a severe and permanent disability of blindness, brain damage, dementia, intellectual impairment, paralysis or major organ disorder [not including hear]; or
- . Hold a Department of Veterans' Pensioner Concession Card that is endorsed Extreme Disablement Adjustment [EDA] or Totally and Permanently Incapacitated [TPI].

Members who have the yearly limit but can show that they need a higher limit can apply for one through the Victorian Taxi Directorate.

The program is coordinated by the Victorian Taxi Directorate, part of the Department of Infrastructure.

For More information go to www.taxi.vic.gov.au

Taken from State Trustees—Community Wellbeing Winter 2006

Special Disability Trusts

Following the passage of legislation through Federal Parliament detailed information is now available on the establishment of a 'special disability trust' to assist with the accommodation and support of a person with a severe disability.

In October 2005, the Government announced its intention to assist families wishing to make private financial provisions into a trust account for the current or future accommodation or care of a family member with a severe disability. It announced concessions on means test and gifting that would apply for amounts of up to \$500,000. The new provisions will come into effect on 20 September 2006.

To develop the detail of the new arrangements the Government set up a committee, chaired by Ian Spicer, which provided advice to the Government after consulting with a range of organisations, including ACROD.

During the consultations there was concern that the eligibility criteria would be overly restrictive. However, the rules announced have largely responded to this concern.

Anyone can establish a special disability trust and anyone - except the principal beneficiary and their partner - can give to the trust (even they can give if the money is from a bequest or superannuation death benefit within three years of receipt).



The principal beneficiary of a special disability trust must be:-

a person over 16 years whose level of impairment would qualify him or her for Disability Support Pension; *and* who has a disability that would, if the person had a sole carer, qualify the carer for Carer Payment or Carer Allowance; *and* as a result of his or her disability "is not working and who has no likelihood of working for a wage that is at or above the relevant minimum wage." ACROD has sought clarification from FaCSIA about this final clause. We understand that the words are not intended to exclude a person who is working, as long as he or she is working at less than the relevant minimum wage.

The eligibility criteria also extend to a person who is living in an institution, hostel or group home and to a child under 16 years who has a profound disability.

The special disability trust is allowed to pay for any reasonable care and accommodation costs incurred by, or on behalf of, the person with severe disability. It cannot be used to pay an immediate family member for providing care to the principal beneficiary.

This advice summarises only some of the features of the special disability trust and should not be relied on by anyone planning to establish such a trust. A detailed fact sheet with a link to the legislation is at http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/carers-future_planning.htm

For further information email your questions to special.disability.trusts@facsia.gov.au or call and leave a message on 1800 081 549.

Contact Information:
Ken Baker, ACROD National Office, Ph 02 6283 3203, kbaker@acrod.org.au

Medicines & Road Safety

Some medicines can affect your driving ability. Alcohol in combination with a medicine can make the effect even worse. This can happen with medicines prescribed by your doctor and those bought with a prescription.

To drive safely:

- Read your medicine labels carefully and obey the directions and warnings—they are there for your protection.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if medicines will affect driving, and if they do, ask for one that doesn't.
- If you are likely to be affected by medicines, take public transport, a taxi or ask a friend or relative to drive.

Warning signs

Early symptoms of being affected by medicines include:

Drowsiness	Undue aggression	Dizziness	Nausea
Light-headedness	Blurred or double vision	Shakiness	

Questions for your pharmacists or doctor

Some combinations of medicines, including natural health remedies can affect your driving ability. If there is anything about your medicines that you don't understand, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Your pharmacist can also give you printed information on most medicines.

You may wish to ask some of the following questions:

- How and when is the best way to use this medicine?
- What food, drinks, or activities should I avoid when taking this medicine?
- Will this medicine interact with any others I am currently taking?
- Are there any side effects that may affect my driving?

Avoid a dangerous driving situation

Avoid driving if you feel that medicines or illness are affecting your driving. Other medicines can often be used instead. So consult your doctor.

- Be especially careful when starting to take a new medicine or an increased dose.
- Avoid taking alcohol and medicine at the same time.
- Avoid taking more than your prescribed dose.
- Never use other people's medicine.
- Avoid driving if you have missed a dose of your prescribed medicine; your condition could make your driving dangerous.
- Don't allow any condition to go untreated.

Some consumers have expressed concerns that recently introduced drug driving tests will detect their prescription medication. The following information is intended as a guide only and to the best of my knowledge the government position is as below. Bernie

When will random roadside saliva testing for drug driving commence?

Police have the power to randomly test any driver on Victorian roads under laws that came into effect on December 1, 2004.

What drugs will be detected with saliva tests?

Random roadside saliva tests will detect the presence of THC (the active component in cannabis) and methamphetamine (speed), also known as ice or crystal meth.

Will my medications be detected?

The saliva tests to be used in Victoria will not detect the presence of prescription drugs or common over-the-counter medications, such as cold and flu tablets. Saliva tests will only detect THC (the active component in cannabis) and methamphetamines (speed) - substances that are not legally prescribed in Australia.

For further information refer to the following websites

www.arrivealive.vic.gov.au

and

www.vicroads.vic.gov.au