



# Southwest Advocacy

## News

Reg. No. A00 259 14Y

Funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Victorian Government of Human Services.

**September 2012**

Address:  
31 Princess Street  
Warrnambool 3280

Postal Address:  
P O Box 480  
Warrnambool 3280

Phone: [03] 5561 4584  
Fax: [03] 5561 4371  
People with hearing or communication impairments may dial 133 677 (National Relay Service) & quote [03] 5561 4584  
Email: swadvocacy@bigpond.com  
Web: www.southwestadvocacy.org.au

### CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Welcome to another Southwest Advocacy Association Newsletter.

Well it has been a very busy quarter for us as an agency with lots happening in the disability field in general.

The Federal Government informs that the first stage of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] is set to get underway with the Barwon area being selected for trial in Victoria. If it eventuates, this scheme will mean that people with disability, regardless of how or where their disability occurred will have more options and control over their lives. The funding will be available to make their lives better. Hopefully that will be the result of this roll out and people with disability, their family and carers, will have the sort of lives they're entitled to. We will wait and see what happens with the Barwon roll out.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission recently undertook research into the needs of students in Victorian schools. The research was initiated following concerns raised by the Commission's Disability Reference Group, parents, advocates and students about discrimination in the provision of education services to students with disabilities. Unfortunately but not surprisingly after 30 years of equal opportunity legislation, 50% of students and parents still feel discriminated against and 25% of the educators had witnessed discrimination. In my experience I have come across some very good schools who work very hard at providing good education to students with disability but also some who don't. These are the ones we will continue to work with to improve their work practice.

I read a dreadful article today after the Community Visitor's annual report was tabled in parliament yesterday. The report describes some atrocious incidents of abuse, assault and neglect of people with disability in supported housing. It found these reports had more than doubled in the past three years. The even more distressing fact is that it is believed that this is only the tip of the ice burg as it is being reported that many incidents which the Community Visitor believe would be a category 1 incident are being reported as 2 or 3 by the residential care organisation.

The good news is that apparently winter is over and we are in spring. I do find that hard to believe at times and am looking forward to summer.

The Quality Assurance work is progressing well and we are in the process of employing another advocate two days per week to allow me more time to get the QA work done. It is very important that we complete this work as our funding depends on it.

We have had 4 volunteer Committee of Management members retire this year, and have had 4 new people come on board but we are always looking for more. As usual there are a number of vacancies available and SWAA is looking to recruit some new talent. Under SWAA's Constitution SWAA must try to ensure that at least 50% of its' Committee of Management is made up of people with disabilities, so people with disabilities with an interest in disability rights are particularly encouraged to apply, but anyone who would like to support SWAA's advocacy work by volunteering to become part of our governance team should contact SWAA for further information. Until next time

Regards

Adele Markwell  
Co-ordinator/Advocate

<b>Inside this issue:</b>	
Co-Ordinator's Report	1
Welcome Break on Mobile Calls	2
Government to Provide Free Talking Set-Top Boxes	2
Campaign for equal access to ABC kicks off today	3
The Disability Services Commissioner	4
Essential Medical Equipment Payment	5
Victoria secures new disability accommodation	6
New-Look Website for Link Disability Magazine	6

## **WELCOME BREAK ON MOBILE CALLS**

From now on calls from mobile phones to 1800 and 1300 numbers will be free, or charged only the cost of a local call.

The announcement by the Australian Communications and Media Authority is a major victory for consumers, who have been paying up to \$1.78 per minute for timed calls from mobile phones to helplines and services such as banks, crisis lines and Centrelink.

The authority said that while the regulatory changes would take at least 12 months, telecommunications providers were welcome to cut their costs before the move was required by law.

*(Taken from Grampians disability Advocacy 'Our Voice, Our Choice' - July 2012)*

## **GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE FREE TALKING SET-TOP BOXES**

Senator Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, has announced that talking set-top boxes will be distributed to blind and vision impaired people as part of the Household Assistance Scheme being coordinated by his department's Digital Switchover Taskforce. The announcement was made during a radio interview with Robyn Gaile, Executive Officer of Blind Citizens Australia.

People who are legally blind or receiving a carer's payment for a legally blind child need to register for the Household Assistance Scheme as their region of Australia transitions to digital-only television. The Government is also investigating the possibility of providing talking set-top boxes to blind and vision impaired people in areas where digital TV switchover has already been completed.

Two talking set-top boxes, which feature talking menus, program guides and other features, were developed for the Household Assistance Scheme and trialed in 2010. One of these, the Bush Talking Set Top Box, went on sale last year. The Federal Government has also commissioned research into which other set-top boxes and TV sets are capable of receiving audio description.

In the interview Senator Conroy also talked about the upcoming trial of audio description on ABC1. "The ABC and my department are developing plans to let interested people know how they can take part in the trial," he said. The trial is due to commence in August, and will involve 14 hours of audio described drama, comedy and documentary per week.

*(Taken from Grampians disability Advocacy 'Our Voice, Our Choice' - July 2012)*

**Southwest Advocacy News is also now available at  
[www.southwestadvocacy.org.au](http://www.southwestadvocacy.org.au)**

## Campaign for equal access to ABC TV kicks off today

Australian blindness and consumer organisations have today launched a national campaign to promote the importance of audio description currently being trialled on ABC TV, and appeal to Communications Minister Senator Stephen Conroy and ABC Managing Director Mark Scott to make the service permanent.

The groups say the ABC audio description service has given over 600,000 Australians who are blind, vision impaired or can benefit from the service proper access to television for the first time.

**Audio description\***, or 'AD', provides an audio narration of what's happening visually on screen during television programs.

The campaign, **It's As Easy As ABC**, will coordinate thousands of Australians to send postcards to Mark Scott and Stephen Conroy, requesting the service be made permanent beyond the AD trial's scheduled end date of 4 November.

"Having access to audio description on the ABC has been incredibly exciting as it's meant that many people who are blind or vision impaired have been able to enjoy television for the first time," says 26-year-old campaign spokeswoman Lauren Henley, who lost her vision in 2006 due to a motor accident.

"We are encouraging everyone to get behind the 'It's As Easy As ABC' campaign by sending a postcard to Senator Conroy and Mark Scott. Access to television is about so much more than simply watching the latest soap opera. It's about choice, civic participation and the ability to be informed."

AD is already widely available on TV in the UK, USA, Canada, Europe and New Zealand. The campaigners say that it is vitally important that the service continues on the ABC and becomes a permanent feature for Australian audiences.

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes says it is important that all Australians have equal access to television.

"Thanks to the ABC trial for the first time I know what's happening during a TV program, rather than enduring long periods of silence or dramatic music. I hope that Mark Scott and Stephen Conroy give all Australians equal access to TV by continuing audio description beyond the trial's end date," said Innes.

The postcards are being distributed around the country via the groups. They can be ordered via [www.audiodescription.com.au](http://www.audiodescription.com.au) and are available in a range of accessible formats.

The Gillard Government has funded the trial to investigate the possibility of delivering the service permanently, something the advocates say is essential.

"It's extremely important that the fantastic service that is currently being delivered on the ABC continues for the benefit of Australians who are blind or vision impaired both now, and in the future," said Henley.

The campaign is being jointly run by Blind Citizens Australia, Vision Australia and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network.

### ENDS

For more information and to order postcards visit [www.audiodescription.com.au](http://www.audiodescription.com.au).

Follow the campaign on Twitter via @ADonTV.

### Media enquiries

Campaign spokesperson Lauren Henley, Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes and Vision Australia General Manager, International and Stakeholder Relations Maryanne Diamond are available for interviews. **Contact:** Elise Davidson (ACCAN) **M:** 0409 966 931 **E:** [elise.davidson@accan.org.au](mailto:elise.davidson@accan.org.au)

### Background

#### \*About audio description

Audio description (AD) is a form of narration which allows people who are blind or vision impaired to enjoy television. Delivered during gaps in dialogue, it describes actions, settings, costumes and other visual cues that are important to understanding what is occurring on screen. Without it, people are left to guess, or rely on family and friends to fill them in.

There are approximately 600,000 people in Australia who are blind, vision impaired or can benefit from using AD (H. Taylor, J. Keeffe, H. Vu, J. Wang, E. Rohtchina, P. Mitchell and M. Pezzullo 2005, '[Vision Loss in Australia](#)', *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 182 no.11, pp. 565-568). AD has also been found to benefit peo-

*(Continued on page 4)*

(Continued from page 3)

ple with an autism spectrum disorder (Garman, J. 2011, '[Autism spectrum, captions and audio description](#)', *Mindful Research*).

### About the AD trial

In August 2012, the ABC commenced [a 13-week technical trial of AD on ABC TV](#). The aim is to assess the technical challenges of delivering AD in Australia.

A selection of primetime Australian and overseas programs have been included as part of the trial including *Dr Who*, *Grand Designs*, *Rake* and *As Time Goes By*.

After the trial, the ABC will submit a report to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) about the technical possibility of delivering a permanent AD service. Senator Stephen Conroy and ABC Managing Director Mark Scott will then decide if AD will continue on Australian TV after the trial.

As the service is delivered via a secondary audio track, it can be turned on or off as needed avoiding any potential disruption to sighted users.

A digital receiver in your television or set top box that can access the AD track is needed to hear it. Turning on AD varies between brands, but generally involves pressing the audio or 'AD' button on a remote control, or activating AD in the set-up menu.

A list of suitable receivers and instructions for turning on AD across different brands is available via the [Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy](#).

### About the spokesperson

Lauren Henley is an Advocacy Officer with Blind Citizens Australia. She is completely blind after losing her sight in a motor vehicle accident in 2006. No longer able to work as a Parks and Gardens Apprentice for her local Council, Lauren decided she could contribute towards addressing some of the many barriers that face people who are blind or vision impaired. One of Lauren's passions is audio description, and she greatly values the many benefits that this service can offer.

### About the campaign

The campaign is being led by Blind Citizens Australia, Vision Australia and Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, with the support of blindness and consumer organisations around Australia.

For more information, visit [www.audiodescription.com.au](http://www.audiodescription.com.au) or follow [@ADonTV on Twitter](https://twitter.com/ADonTV).

Lauren Henley  
NSW Advocacy and Information Officer  
Blind Citizens Australia  
Ph: (02) 9744 9844  
[lauren.henley@bca.org.au](mailto:lauren.henley@bca.org.au)  
[www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au)

(Media Release)

## The Disability Services Commissioner

The Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) is an independent statutory body that provides about and assists in the resolution of complaints about Victorian disability services.

DSC will be hosting an information forum in Warrnambool on Tuesday the 27th of November (1pm - 2.30pm) for families of people using disability services. The venue for the forum is to be confirmed.

The forum will cover:-

The role and function of DSC

Why people don't complain even when they're not happy with the support they're receiving;

Trends in complaints about disability services that DSC has dealt with;

DSCs approach to the resolution of complaints;

What the law requires of disability services in relation to the handling of complaints;

DSCs Family Engagement project: what families think works (and doesn't work) in their relationships with service providers.

Light refreshments will be provided at the forum.

If you would like to find out more about this forum please contact DSC on 1300 728 187 or at [contact@odsc.vic.gov.au](mailto:contact@odsc.vic.gov.au)

## Essential Medical Equipment Payment

The Essential Medical Equipment Payment is an annual \$140 payment to people who experience additional increases in home energy costs from the use of essential medical equipment to manage their disability or medical condition. Payments started from 1 July 2012.

You may be eligible for this payment if you or the person in your regular care at home either holds or is included on one of the following cards:

- Health Care Card
- Pensioner Concession Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card, or
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold or White Card

And provide proof that the specified essential medical equipment or medically required heating/cooling is required as a result of a specified medical condition. This proof can be provided as:

- Certification from a Medical Practitioner, or
- Evidence that the medically required equipment (excluding medically required heating/cooling) current qualifies for assistance under one of the state or territory government schemes, or the Department of Veterans' Affairs Rehabilitation Appliances Program.

You may also need to prove that you, or the person you care for, contribute to the payment of the home energy account. The following list of equipment will attract an Essential Medical Equipment Payment. These items (except electric wheelchairs) currently attract subsidies under the various state and territory government life support equipment subsidy schemes. Equipment not listed will not attract an Essential Medical Equipment Payment.

- Home Dialysis Machine
- Home Ventilator
- Home Respirator
- Home Parenteral or Enteral Feeding Device
- Oxygen Concentrator
- Heart Pump
- Suction Pump
- Infant Apnoea Monitor—prescribed by a

Medical Practitioner following apnoeic episodes

- Nebuliser—used daily
- Positive Airways Pressure Device
- Phototherapy Equipment
- Airbed Vibrator
- Electric Wheelchair
- Insulin Pump

To be eligible, the equipment must be powered by a form of energy where the cost will increase under a carbon price. These forms of energy are electricity, natural gas, petroleum gas, diesel, heating oil, petrol or kerosene.,

If you have one or more of the following specified medical conditions outlined and as a result you medically require heating and/or cooling in the home to regulate body temperature, you may be eligible for the Essential Medical Equipment Payment.

- Spinal cord injury at or above the T7 level
- Stroke
- Brain injury
- A Neurodegenerative disorder
- The Muscular Dystrophies
- Full thickness burns covering more than 20 per cent of the body surface area
- Rare disorders of sweating including congenital absence or mal-development of sweat glands
- Chronic erythrodermas

To apply for the Essential Medical Equipment payment online go to:

**<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/essential-medical-equipment-payment>**

There will be no need to reapply in future years unless your personal circumstances change. To receive this payment, you will also need to be in Australia on the date that you apply for the payment and on the anniversary of this date in subsequent years.

Dependent children are not able to claim this payment.

## Victoria secures new disability accommodation

More than 50 new accommodation places for people with disabilities have been secured through a funding commitment of more than \$30 million from the Victorian Coalition and Commonwealth governments, Community Services Minister Mary Wooldridge announced in April, 2012.

The allocation of more than \$14 million from the Victorian Coalition Government and \$17 million from the Commonwealth's *Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund* (SAIF) will provide 53 new community-based accommodation places through nine service providers.

"This is a great result for Victoria and the successful service providers and delivers on a Coalition election commitment," Ms Wooldridge said.

"The Commonwealth has provided the capital funding to establish the accommodation and the Victorian Government has allocated more than \$14.7 million over four years to support the successful providers to cover ongoing costs for the delivery of the new services.

"The contribution of the Victorian Government will allow successful service providers to provide a greater range of innovative and flexible options to meet the diverse and growing needs of people with a disability."

The providers will help people with both a mental illness and disability; young people at risk of going into a nursing home; and young people with autism who display challenging behaviors.

In 2011 the Victorian Government held community consultations to hear ideas about how supported accommodation and respite services can be provided to better meet people's needs. The information collected was used to help service providers develop their SAIF submissions.

"A focus on innovative and flexible models of support will provide people with a disability increased choice and improved lifestyles," Ms Wooldridge said.

*(Taken from Grampians disability Advocacy 'Our Voice, Our Choice' - July 2012)*

## NEW-LOOK WEBSITE FOR LINK DISABILITY MAGAZINE

A new-look website **for** people with disability has been launched **by** people with disability.

The accessibility-savvy site [www.linkonline.com.au](http://www.linkonline.com.au) is the online version of [Link Disability Magazine](#), which is published and created by Inprint Design, an Australian Disability Enterprise in Adelaide.

Through the website, readers can access disability-relevant information, such as feature articles, news items, medical breakthroughs and more. The online viewing experience includes enhanced zoom, ease of access and a clear lay-out.

The national, cross-disability magazine is published five times a year. It is produced without the assistance of government funding, relying solely on sponsorship, advertising and subscriptions.

The publication caters to people with disability, their families and carers, disability organisations, health professionals, service providers, and policy-makers, as well as being available at most public libraries in Australia.



The Disability Magazine is available  
for viewing online at  
[www.linkonline.com.au](http://www.linkonline.com.au)

*(Taken from Grampians disability Advocacy 'Our Voice, Our Choice' - July 2012)*