

Better Information and Communication Practices

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Introduction

This booklet is designed to assist you to provide information to, and effectively communicate with, people with disability. It covers issues such as accessible formats for major disability groups and provides contact details for organisations that can advise you on the communication needs of particular disability groups.

According to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers undertaken in 2003, it is estimated that 3.95 million Australians (20%) had a disability. This number can be expected to increase with the ageing of the population projected for early this century. In order to ensure that these people have the same opportunity to participate fully in community life as other Australians, we need to think about ways of providing them with information and making verbal communication easier.

Many people with disability are disadvantaged through our traditional reliance on print media and verbal communication. This includes a number of people with vision, hearing or intellectual impairment, acquired brain injury or psychiatric disability. Some of these people also come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and may therefore have additional communication needs that should be considered.

The Commonwealth Disability Strategy

The Commonwealth Disability Strategy is a framework to assist Commonwealth organisations to improve access for people with disability to their programs, services and facilities. The Strategy provides practical guidance to assist organisations to remove the barriers that face people with disability. Further information about the Strategy can be obtained from the Disability Policy and Coordination Branch, Department of Families, Housing, community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

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Information Needs of Disability Groups

When considering how you can best disseminate information to people with a range of disabilities, it may be necessary to present your message in a number of different formats. The quick reference table at the end of this section lists a number of formats that may be useful for the needs of various audiences. The next section of this booklet explains each format, the disability group for which it is commonly used and the ways in which you can advertise the availability of these formats.

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People with Vision Impairment

The definition of vision impairment includes people who are blind and people who have limited vision. At least 75 per cent of people with vision impairment have some functional vision and only a small percentage of people have no useful vision.

If you provide information only in standard print you are effectively excluding this group from access to it. Likewise, using the print media to advertise the availability of information in accessible formats means that some of the people for whom it is intended won't know that it is

available.

Producing information in disk, large print, audio and Braille formats will go some way towards meeting the information needs of people who are blind or severely vision impaired. Publicising the availability of the information through Radio for the Print Handicapped or the Internet will mean that it is more likely to reach its target audience.

It will not always be necessary to hold large quantities of materials in a range of accessible formats. There will be occasions when it is sufficient to advertise that information can be provided in Braille or on audio cassette, on request.

The following are examples of what you can do to make a person with vision impairment feel at ease and to facilitate communication:

- speak clearly in a normal voice - most people who have a vision impairment can hear clearly and therefore there is no need to raise your voice. The person may not be able to 'see' you, but is probably very perceptive about the direction of sound;
- make sure that you are facing the person - if you continually look away while still talking to the person they may take offence, perceiving, that you are not interested in them;
- verbalise your thoughts and feelings because the person may not be able to see non-verbal cues;
- feel comfortable using words such as 'look' and 'see'. They are words that people with a vision impairment also use;
- when meeting people who have a vision impairment, address them by name and always introduce yourself by name;
- when entering or leaving a room say something that announces your presence or intention to leave, saving the person the embarrassment of speaking to an empty space; and
- if the person is accompanied by a guide dog, do not pat it, or otherwise distract the dog from its work.

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People with Hearing Impairment

The definition of hearing impairment includes people who are deaf and people who have very limited hearing. The Australian Hearing Service estimates that one in every ten Australians experience difficulty in hearing, and approximately half of these people would benefit from using a hearing aid.

Many people who are deaf use a sign language called Auslan (Australian Sign Language) as their preferred mode of communication. Many of these people do not regard themselves as disabled by their deafness, viewing themselves as members of a specific language group and generally referring to themselves as the Deaf community. For information on how you can contact Auslan interpreters see Appendix 1.

People with hearing impairment will generally use printed material as their main source of information. The Internet and electronic mail are a popular mode of communication for people who are deaf or hearing impaired.

When organising a public meeting or consultation you may need to think about providing aids to oral communication to ensure that people with hearing impairment have equal access to information and are able to participate in discussion. Such arrangements could include:

- provision of a hearing induction loop in the meeting room;
- engaging a sign language interpreter for participants who are deaf;
- providing written material to accompany oral presentations; and
- ensuring that any videos screened at the meeting have captions (subtitles).

The following are examples of what you can do to make a person with hearing impairment feel at ease and to facilitate communication:

- get the person's attention before speaking to them or else they might not realise that you are talking to them - a tap on the arm or shoulder is acceptable;
- make sure that you are facing the person and that you do not lower your head or turn away as this can reduce the volume of your voice;
- remember that people with hearing impairment often lip-read as a means to understand what is being said, so it is important that they can see your face clearly. If a person is lip-reading, do not chew or obstruct the view of your lips when speaking as this can distort the message;
- do not speak with your back to a light source such as a window, as this puts your face into shadow and makes lip-reading very difficult;
- speak clearly and slowly. You may need to speak louder than usual but do not speak too loudly as this can distort the sound, particularly if the person is using a hearing aid;
- enunciate each word clearly, but don't over exaggerate your expression;
- be aware that you may need to repeat words. If repeating what you have said does not assist the person, rephrasing your sentence may help;
- move to a quieter location if the person is having more than their usual trouble hearing you;
- do not talk while walking away as the person will probably not be able to hear you; and
- if all else fails write it down, it is better to communicate clearly through writing than to either pretend you understand or to totally ignore the person.

There are also a number of modifications which can be made to information and communication practices to ensure that people who have hearing impairment have equal access. For example, use of a TTY (telephone typewriter) and/or the National Relay Service can enable people who are deaf and hearing impaired to communicate on the telephone. For information on the use of the TTY and the National Relay Service, see Appendix 1.

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People with Intellectual Disability

People with intellectual disability can have difficulty understanding complex language and they may have low literacy skills. The use of complex language and concepts can prevent people with this disability from obtaining vital information and/or services, which they need for day-to-day living. When communicating with people with intellectual disability it is important to use plain English when writing and speaking.

When speaking to people with intellectual disability:

- speak clearly, do not mumble or turn your head away;

- do not speak in a patronising manner;
- use clear language - avoid acronyms and long, complex, unusual words;
- if necessary, clarify with the person that they have understood you; and
- be prepared to rephrase information, using different words if the person does not understand you.

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People with Acquired Brain Injury

People with acquired brain injury will vary greatly in the extent to which their communication is affected (if at all). Some people may have difficulty with literacy and understanding complex language. Others may have problems with memory, planning and organising. Some people have considerable cognitive problems that may not be immediately evident. Others may have physical and coordination problems.

In communicating with people with acquired brain injury you could consider:

- writing down appointments, bus numbers and other information that the person may need to remember;
- offering to escort the person to a location rather than giving complex directions;
- offering to provide reminder calls and notices through the post;
- offering to provide home visiting or home delivery services.

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People with Psychiatric Disability

Very few generalisations can be made about providing accessible information to people with psychiatric disability. There is enormous variation between people as to how their disability affects their ability to communicate. Sometimes medications prescribed for a person's condition can affect their ability to communicate and to absorb and remember information.

In the case of face-to-face communication, a person may feel more at ease and be able to communicate more effectively if you make a few simple adjustments such as:

- providing a calm environment;
- presenting information clearly;
- being aware of short concentration spans;
- being prepared to repeat and/or rephrase information;
- being aware that some people may have a degree of memory loss; and
- being aware that personal questions may be viewed as threatening.

These adjustments may also assist some people with acquired brain injury.

The greatest barrier to effective communication with people with psychiatric disability is community attitudes and misconceptions (for example, the perception that the person could be dangerous). In fact, only a minority of people with psychiatric disability ever become aggressive and even then it is rare for them to express this to strangers. Fear based on such misconceptions can make good communication difficult.

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People with Manipulatory Disability

People with manipulatory disabilities have difficulty holding and/or moving objects because of problems associated with their arms and hands. This may be due to nerve injuries, arthritis or amputation. They may find it difficult to hold books or papers and turn pages. When providing information for this audience, the formats to consider include the Internet, disk, audio cassette, video and radio. Many people with manipulatory disability use Radio for the Print Handicapped to get access to community information.

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People with Mobility Disability

People with a mobility disability, including those with a temporary disability, may find their access to mainstream information limited. They may be unable to travel to libraries or meetings or may encounter difficulties with inaccessible buildings. They too may prefer to receive information via the Internet, radio, cassette, video or disk.

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Summary

The following table provides a list of various disability groups and formats generally used by them. People with psychiatric disability or acquired brain injury are not listed in the table, as requirements need to be determined for each individual.

People with vision impairment	audio cassette Braille disk/electronic large and illustrated print Internet radio
People with hearing impairment	Internet video including captions easy English
People with intellectual disability	large and illustrated print easy English video including captions
People with mobility disability	Internet radio audio cassette video including captions disk/electronic
People with manipulatory disability	audio cassette Internet radio video including captions disk\electronic

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Use of Language

A positive tone and inclusive language are a vital part of both oral and written communication.

Here are some points to remember:

- put the person not the disability first: the correct terminology is 'a person with'; for example 'a person with vision impairment' or 'people with mobility disability';
- avoid referring to people by categories: 'the blind', 'the disabled'. People may have similar disabilities, but they are all unique individuals;
- avoid phrases that demean people with disability. Words such as unfit, defective and incapacitated, imply inferiority - what is absent is emphasised rather than the individual's capabilities;
- avoid words such as handicapped, crippled and wheelchair-bound;
- don't treat all disability groups as if they are the same. The effect of a disability on a person's lifestyle can vary widely;
- where possible avoid jargon when you speak and write. If you need to use technical terms explain their meaning. Adding illustrations to a publication can help make the explanation clearer; and
- keep your sentences short. Have one main idea per sentence. Paragraphs with clear headings make written information easier to understand, as do illustrations and photographs.

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Formats

There are a number of accessible formats available for presenting your material that are suitable for a wide range of the community. Some formats will cater to the needs of more than one disability group, and some will be of benefit to the community in general. For example, illustrated print may assist people with low literacy, intellectual disability, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The following is a brief description of each format.

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Audio Cassette

This format is accepted by a wide range of people although it is often targeted to people with vision impairment. People who are blind sometimes prefer audio cassettes to Braille for material that they do not intend to keep for long periods. They are easy and cost effective to produce and post and can also be used by people with manipulatory disability.

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Braille

This format is used by people who are blind and have learned the Braille alphabet. Braille is a series of raised dots set out in such a way that they form letters and words. People who are blind read text by feeling the dots.

Several organisations produce Braille text. In most cases, to have text converted into Braille, you need to provide your text in an electronic format. This usually makes the Braille cheaper to produce. The cost usually involves paying for the master copy and then for additional copies of the document in Braille.

There are a number of organisations around Australia who will be able to assist you with requests for information in Braille. To find one that is near you contact:

Blind Citizens Australia

13 Barrett Street
KENSINGTON VIC 3031
Phone: (03) 9372 6400 (Toll Free:1800 033 660)
TTY: (03) 9376 9275
Fax: (03) 9372 6466
Email: bca@bca.org.au

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Disk

Many people in the community, including those with vision impairment or manipulatory disability, prefer information on a disk. These people will have access to computer technology that transforms the electronic information into an accessible format for them. The text can be read in large print on a computer screen, fed to a Braille printer or transformed into a computer-generated voice. Information on disk should be converted to ASCII format. You can do this on a personal computer making it a cheap and easy way to meet information needs.

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Large and Illustrated Print

Large print is mainly targeted to those with vision impairment, but is also helpful to other members of the community. Illustrated print is designed to provide a quick visual outline of a message and can be in comic style (like a cartoon) or brochure with large colourful diagrams and pictures. It is often preferred by people with intellectual disability, people with some vision impairment and can also assist people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Large print refers to any printed matter that uses a font that is 14 point or larger. While the size of the font is important there are other factors that you need to consider when producing large print material, including:

- using simple and clear fonts;
- using simple and clear design with good contrast between text and background colours;

- allowing single spacing between lines;
- using a left-justified margin so that the right margin is ragged and easily seen by the reader;
- avoiding glossy and/or coloured paper, as it is more difficult to read from than a matt finished white paper or paper of a pale buff colour. People with vision impairment can find print on heavily coloured paper more difficult to read;
- avoiding pictures or abstract designs under the text;
- using photos in preference to cartoons where appropriate; and
- considering the use of a poster, rather than text to convey information. Posters are popular and can act as a reminder to reinforce your message.

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Plain English

Present your message in clear, concise, easily understood language. Complex language and jargon can prevent many people from understanding and using the information or services you are providing. The use of clear, easily understood language will be popular with most members of the community, including people with a range of disabilities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people wanting a quick overview of your information.

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Easy English

If you are providing information specifically to people with intellectual disabilities or with limited reading skills, you might consider using easy English. In this format the information is summarised and expressed in short sentences that each convey a single idea or concept. It also assists support people to explain the information to people with intellectual disabilities.

If you are preparing text specially for the use of people with an intellectual disability there are some other issues which you may wish to consider, for example:

- using cartoons or pictures to explain complex ideas; and
- testing the translation with people with an intellectual disability and/or acquired brain injury to ensure that they understand the meaning.

The Disability Branch can provide contact details for people who prepare easy English translations. The Commonwealth Disability Strategy Internet site www.fahcsia.gov.au/cds also contains a list of providers of information in accessible formats.

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Internet and Intranet Pages

People with disability are increasingly able to get access to information on the Internet. It is a highly suitable format for people with hearing, vision, mobility and/or manipulatory impairments who have access to a computer. Many people have software that allows them to format the screen to suit their particular needs - such as changing to a larger font, suitable colours or using a large screen. However, not everyone has Internet access so it can not be used to reach the whole community.

If you are publishing information on the Internet, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes will help you make your World Wide Web documents accessible to the broadest possible audience. The Advisory Notes are available on the Commission's Website:
www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/standards/standards.html

All Australian Government agency websites and Intranets should be Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliant. The WCAG 1.0 guidelines provide a series of checkpoints, each of which has a priority level based on the checkpoints impact on the accessibility of a website.

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Radio

This medium is widely used by most members of the community, except those with severe hearing impairment. Community radio stations and the Radio for the Print Handicapped are ideal media for advertising or publishing information for the general public. You will need to consider your target group, timeslot, content and age when planning radio presentations.

The Australian Council for Radio for the Print Handicapped is the national body responsible for this service. Each state has its own radio station. If you have a request for a national presentation, or simply want more information about Radio for the Print Handicapped, you can contact:

Australian Council for Radio for the Print Handicapped

454 Glenferrie Road
KOOYONG VIC 3144
Phone: (03) 9864 9207
Fax: (03) 9864 9213

Remember that people with disability can be from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. SBS Radio's purpose is to provide news, practical assistance, entertainment and communications for Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly recent arrivals and those with limited English. SBS Radio broadcasts nationally in 66 languages. The SBS Marketing Manager may be contacted at:

SBS Radio Marketing

Locked Bag 028
CROWS NEST NSW 1585
Phone: (02) 9430 2817
Fax: (02) 9430 3559
Toll Free
1800 500 727 (Nationwide)
or TTY 1800 502 828

Information is also available on the SBS website at: www.sbs.com.au

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Video

This can be a very successful format for giving information to the community including people with disability. Showing real life situations or examples of your product or service can relay the message more clearly than a printed document. Videos are particularly successful with

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as a number of other groups.

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Captions

Captioning your video ensures that you are catering to the widest possible audience. Careful choice and presentation of captions also reinforces the message to all viewers. Captions are useful for people who are deaf or have hearing impairment; they may also be of benefit for people learning or improving English.

Captions may not be word for word but retain all the key information, the flavour of the program and the meaning of the message.

The Australian Caption Centre is often commissioned by Government departments and other organisations to produce captions for their videos. The Centre also provides a free information service. They can be contacted at:

The Australian Caption Centre

Level 4, 187 Thomas Street

HAYMARKET NSW 2000

Phone: (02) 9212 5277

TTY: (02) 9212 3129

Fax: (02) 9281 2198

www.auscap.com.au

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Other Material

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission also recommends that publishers of material in electronic formats, that is, cd-rom, disk, Internet and intranet, consult the Guidelines for Commonwealth information published in electronic formats. The web publishing guidelines are available from the [Australian Government Information Management Office](#).

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E-accessibility

Access to electronic information

All Australian Government agencies need to consider the accessibility of the technologies and software they use in providing information and services to their clients and staff with disability.

E-accessibility can be achieved through:

- **Assistive technologies** – products and technology based services that enable people with disability to use and benefit from electronic and web based information and services
- **Accessible design** – websites and other information technologies are designed to be accessible to as many people as possible without modification
- **Alternative formats and media** – electronic and web-based information and services are available in alternative formats to ensure access for people with disability

The following points need to be kept in mind when developing plans to improve e-accessibility:

- information published in an electronic format is accessible to people with disability;
- web based services and agency specific software are designed to be both useable and accessible by people with disability without the need for modification;
- public terminals and kiosks providing access to government services are accessible for people with disability;
- information published in electronic form is available in alternative formats to meet the accessibility needs of people with disability;
- government agencies consult with accessibility specialists, assistive technology users and/or representatives of people with disability to inform purchase specifications;
- ICT contracts and tenders include the requirement for the contractor and / or supplier to address assistive technology and software compatibility needs and issues;
- accessibility and compatibility with assistive technology products is considered in the purchase of COTS (commercial off the shelf) software;
- new technologies are developed to provide equitable access for people with disability without the need for modification;
- government agencies consult with and involve accessibility specialists, assistive technology users, people with disability and/or their representatives in testing web-based services and/or software products prior to their sign off;
- intranet and internal electronic documentation is accessible to as many Australian Public Service staff as possible;
- staff with disability are provided with up-to-date assistive technologies to facilitate their use of computer technology and electronic information; and
- internal systems and software applications are compatible and accessible by staff who use assistive technologies.

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Disseminating Your Information

You can avoid excessive cost by carefully targeting your audience. For instance, you may decide to target your information to the wider community, via standard formats, and then provide accessible formats on request. Another option is to provide the peak disability consumer bodies

with the standard format plus accessible formats to be made available to their members. Alternatively you could provide a copy of your information for the consumer organisation's newsletter. You may consider using a range of media, such as videos, together with verbal reminders and posters over a period of time to reach different groups. When developing accessible formats you will need to consider issues, such as:

- ***What does your audience need to know?*** Can a pamphlet or booklet in an accessible format get the message across with supplementary documents being available on request?
- ***Are you catering for all people with disability or a single disability group?*** If you are only catering for one group, then a smaller range of formats may be needed.
- ***Who are you targeting?*** If you are providing detailed information on government services, your target audience may be everyone in the community and this may mean providing information in a number of widely accepted formats. If the information is not directly focussed on disability issues then providing an accessible format on request may be sufficient.
- ***Have you asked people with a disability what their information needs might be?*** The best way to find out the information needs of people with disability is to consult them. The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) may be able to assist you in estimating the number of copies of each format you may need (see Appendix 2).
- ***Have you thought about people with multiple disabilities?*** Careful choice of a range of formats will help to ensure that all members of the community, including those with one or more disabilities receive your information. It is not uncommon for a person with hearing impairment to also have vision impairment; a person with any physical disability may come from a culturally diverse background and a person with intellectual disability may have vision or hearing impairment.

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Advertising

Effective advertising is a vital part of ensuring your information reaches your target audience. While the mainstream media may reach most members of the community, you may wish to consider alternative channels of communication to ensure that you reach people with disability. Some of these channels are listed below.

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Freecall™ Telephone Numbers: are an accepted method for allowing people to contact your organisation for information. They can also cut down on advertising costs, since you will not need to provide contact postal addresses in various locations.

If you are using a Freecall™ number for your organisation's business you may want to consider a TTY telephone Freecall™ as well. Information on these services can be obtained from Telstra on Freecall™ 13 20 00.

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Electronic Information: If you are providing information on disk, or on cd-rom, it should be in plain English. As not all people with a disability have access to computer technology, hard copy formats will also need to be made available.

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Internet Advertising: the internet is rapidly becoming an accepted alternative form of communication and provides the opportunity for better access to information and services for people with disability. If your organisation has a website on the internet, this is an ideal place to advertise the availability of information and materials and the accessible formats in which it's available, including Freecall™ and TTY telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and ordering details.

Please remember that people with vision impairment may be unable to read information where there are a lot background textures, designs or bright colours.

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National Peak Disability Bodies: many peak bodies have their own newsletters that provide a good forum to communicate with people with disability. If the topic is of interest to the community, these bodies will often publish prepared articles in their newsletters. they may also be able to assist in the distribution of relevant information although they may require some financial assistance to do this (see link to Peak Disability Bodies on the Commonwealth Disability Services website for contact details).

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Department Newsletters: Centrelink and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) mail out regular newsletters to their large client population. Many of these are already available in accessible formats. Other Commonwealth agencies may find them useful to advertise their programs and services.

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Appendix 1

Information and communication for people who are deaf or have hearing impairment:

Auslan is the language of the Australian Deaf community. Auslan interpreters can be hired and should be used in situations such as public meetings, interviews and staff meetings, where a staff member needs to communicate in Auslan. It should be noted that most languages other than English have their own sign language. As there are not many interpreters available to translate foreign sign languages to English, often family members and friends translate and should be accommodated accordingly.

Signing interpreters are available through each state's deaf organisation.

Appendix 2

National Peak Disability Bodies

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS LTD

Ross House
247 Flinders Lane
Melbourne VIC 3000
Tel: (03) 9662 3324
Fax: (03) 9662 3325
TTY: (03) 9662 3724
E-mail: office@afdo.org.au
Website: www.afdo.org.au

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF INC

PO Box 1083
Stafford QLD 4053
Tel: (07) 3357 8266
Fax: (07) 3357 8377
TTY: (07) 3357 8277
Email: aad@aad.org.au
Website: www.aad.org.au

BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIAN LTD

PO Box 24
Sunshine VIC 3020
Tel: (03) 9372 6400
Freecall: 1800 033 660
Fax: (03) 9372 6466
Email: bca@bca.org.au
Website: www.bca.org.au

BRAIN IINJURY AUSTRALIA INC

86 Herbert Street
Northcote VIC 3070
Tel: (03) 9497 8074
Fax: (03) 9486 7941
E-mail: admin@bia.net.au
Website: www.bia.net.au

DEAFNESS FORUM OF AUSTRALIA LTD

218 Northbourne Avenue
Braddon ACT 2612
Tel: (02) 6262 7808
Fax: (02) 6262 7810
TTY: (02) 6262 7809
E-mail: info@deafnessforum.org.au
Website: www.deafnessforum.org.au

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY INC

PO Box 771

Mawson ACT 2607

Tel: (02) 6296 4400

Fax: (02) 6296 4488

E-mail: ncid@ncid.org.au

Website: www.ncid.org.au

NATIONAL ETHNIC DISABILITY ALLIANCE INC

PO Box 9381

Harris Park NSW 2150

Tel: (02) 8844 8310

Fax: (02) 9635 5355

E-mail: office@neda.org.au

Website: www.neda.org.au

PHYSICAL DISABILITY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA LTD

PO Box 38

Willawarrin NSW 2440

Tel: (02) 6567 1500

E-mail: pdca@pdca.org.au

Website: www.pdca.org.au

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AUSTRALIA INC

PO Box 605

Rosny Park TAS 7018

Tel: (03) 6244 8288

Fax: (03) 6244 8255

E-mail: wwda@wwda.org.au

Website: www.wwda.org.au