



Strategy & Corporate Services

9th May 2011

Ms Patricia Scott
Commissioner
Productivity Commission
By email: disability-support@pc.gov.au

Acting Executive Director
Regulatory Affairs
Level 22
275 George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Australia

Dear Ms Scott

Disability Care and Support – Public Inquiry – Draft Report

I would like to congratulate you, on behalf of Telstra, on the comprehensive and consultative approach you have taken to this inquiry and note the large number of submissions from interested parties, including Telstra.

We were, however, disappointed to note that the draft report does not mention the role that access to modern communications can play in supporting people with disability, particularly when the Draft Report proposes that the first eligibility criterion for funding under a Scheme is for people who: “have significant limitations in communication, mobility or self-care”.

I refer the Commission again to our submission and to other reports, such as “A giant leap and a big deal: Delivering on the promise of equal access to broadband” by Lyle, E. E. 2010¹, which highlights the care and support opportunities for people with disability that can come from access to modern communications technologies. The report concludes that this access is “a big deal”.

While it may be implied under “Aids and appliances”, it is not clear that needed communications equipment will be eligible for funding under the Scheme, should the customer request it.

I would again ask that you consider the recommendations we made in our earlier submission:

Recommendation 1.

Access to appropriate telecommunications services be identified as a “core formal service” eligible for funding under a Long-Term Disability Care and Support scheme.

¹ FCC: Omnibus Broadband Initiative, available at <http://blog.broadband.gov/?entryId=391546>

Recommendation 2.

Future Australian taxation reviews, including the follow-up to the Henry review, should consider the extension of the preferential tax treatment of purpose-built disability equipment (including under the GST) to all equipment specifically supplied to provide communications access for people with disability.

Recommendation 3.

Research and development of appropriate localised telecommunications solutions, including software applications, be eligible for funding under a Long-Term Disability Care and Support scheme.

Recommendation 4.

Equipment, applications and services to enable people with disability to fully participate in online social networks, particularly immersive online communities, be eligible for funding under a Long-Term Disability Care and Support scheme.

Recommendation 5.

Access to bespoke communications solutions through specialist service providers such as Independent Living Centre (ILC), Novita and Technical Aid to the Disabled (TAD) be included under any Long-Term Disability Care and Support scheme in cases of severe, profound or complex disability.

I wish you the very best as you finalise your report to the Government on this very important public policy issue.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Williams
Acting Executive Director – Regulatory Affairs
Strategy & Corporate Services