

Submission for Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Disability Discrimination Act

From information gathered at a community forum in Mansfield, Victoria to discuss the DDA and it's effectiveness. Attendees at the forum were:

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Awareness of the DDA

- There is a lack of information about the DDA to the general public
- A plain English booklet on the DDA should be distributed through Centrelink & provided directly to clients
- Needs to be clear, concise, user friendly and available in a variety of formats e.g. talking books, Braille and through a variety of outlets e.g. libraries, local governments, service providers etc
- Awareness of the DDA should be involved in training courses e.g. architecture, hospitality, etc
- Sometimes it is difficult to define discrimination and the line between what sort of discrimination can be hazy at best

Disability Discrimination in the Region

Physical Access

- Buildings are often not user friendly
- Big business often do not seem to consider discrimination issues e.g. Alpine Resorts do not have access policies or appropriate access
- Small business can be more amenable if they consider customers although there are a large percentage of local business who fail to provide adequate access
- There needs to be consistent signage of amenities
- People with visual impairment are often disadvantaged with new building materials and design particularly the use of glass and mirrors
- Need to be inclusive laws that means that all buildings are accessible for all
- There is also a need for more inclusive language
- Some inconsistencies e.g. trains in Victoria will accept scooters on the train; the same train in NSW will not allow the same scooter to travel

Visible vs Invisible Disabilities

- Intellectual disability is less obvious and discrimination still exists as carers are necessary for clients to access the whole community
- People with such invisible conditions such as epilepsy are often not understood and most people do not know what their needs are or how to respond to them when the need arises

Effectiveness of the DDA

- Since 1987, improvements have occurred in attitude to disability
- Communities are gradually becoming more aware of the needs of people with disabilities by those living in the communities. This is more as a result of the expectations of those people pushing the boundaries to enable participation. The DDA has not been a factor in this and this approach is probably more effective in smaller centres than larger towns
- There are increasing concessions available e.g. QANTAS carer concession and the new companion card
- It is difficult for people to put in a complaint under the DDA because they still have to live and work in the community
- People with disabilities feel noticed enough without having to make an issue over discrimination
- The battle is hard enough every day without fighting an extra battle i.e. the battle against discrimination
- The DDA needs to become a tool rather than a law
- Making a complaint – unsure of how to go about this – once again this gets back to readily available information and exactly what is appropriate to make a complaint.
- Often issues build up and once they become too great, it is only then that a person feels like acting.

Other Comments

- People from rural and regional areas are discriminated against because of where issues are heard and the law administered
- Warnings about potentially prohibitive costs is enough to stop an action
- Generally most people would not use the DDA because they do not understand the law or how to go about making a complaint or even what constitutes discrimination
- Information about services, benefits and the law are not easily accessible and information is not given out by service providers.

Summary

- There is a general lack of information about the DDA, what it covers and how it can be used – the 'Law' is too distant from the average person who needs to be able to understand it. Accessible information and details of 'how to' are not readily available
- People with disabilities and their carers feel uncomfortable about going down a legal path – They feel intimidated by the legal aspects of making a complaint; they don't want to draw attention to themselves and do not want to gain a name as a 'whinger' or trouble maker especially in their home town; and often they do not have the energy to go down this path as life is very demanding
- Things have improved over the years, but there is still much in the community that remains inaccessible for all
- There is a general lack of enforced or even accepted standards of access and inclusion around the community. Often people are unaware of their responsibilities in this area and even people with disabilities are unaware of exactly what the law covers and would allow.