

Penrith City Council

Submission to the Australian Government Productivity Commission Inquiry into Disability Care and Support

August 2010

Penrith City covers an area of approximately 407sq kilometres and is located 55kms from the Sydney CBD on the main western rail line. Penrith is a mix of urban and rural environments with a population of approximately 180,000 residents.

Penrith has been identified by the NSW Government as a regional city. The University of Western Sydney and Nepean Hospital are located in the local government area. Penrith City services the needs of a catchment of approximately 320,000 people. Many people with a disability are attracted to the area due to the convenient access to health care facilities and City Centre services as well as affordable housing options.

According to the 2003 estimates contained in the ABS Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers, within the Penrith Local Government Area

- 6,392 people have a profound to severe disability causing severe core activity limitation
- 3,625 people have moderate disability causing moderate core activity limitation
- 7,319 people have a mild disability causing mild core activity limitation
- 23,670 people are classified as having 'any disability'

Over many years Penrith City Council has taken an important leadership role in contributing to a more inclusive and accessible City. In this role Council has adopted a strategic, planned and sustainable approach that ensures Council's work makes a difference to the quality of life and life opportunities for people with disability in the City. Progress is regularly reviewed, refined and extended to deliver tangible improvements and benefits for people with disabilities.

Penrith City Council is committed to improving access and supporting the wellbeing of people with disability and their families and carers. Council invests significant resources in the ongoing development of a robust service system for people living with disability in the City through service planning, contributing to service coordination, working with disability service organisations and advocacy.

Local Councils are strategically placed between the community and the other two levels of government as key stakeholders and important partners in addressing the needs of people with people with disability and their carers.

A new system for the provision of disability services could build on the foundations established by Penrith Council and reinforce and support Council's leadership role.

- **Promoting access and social inclusion through Access Committees and the implementation of local Disability Action or Inclusion Plans.**

Penrith City Council's Access Committee is an important building block in Council's approach to enhancing the quality of life for people with disability in Penrith City. The Committee provides advice about policy and other matters concerning the access and interests of people with disability. The committee consists of three Councillors and up to six community representatives.

Council recognises there are many obstacles to full community participation experienced by people with disability and their carers. The Penrith Inclusion Plan is a comprehensive strategy designed to address these barriers.

The 'Penrith Inclusion Plan – People with Disability 2009-2013' identifies over 80 strategies and actions to be implemented over the next four years to make Penrith more accessible and inclusive for all its residents including people with disability. The plan is based on extensive community consultation and provides a platform for Council to strengthen its leadership role in working with government agencies, local service providers and community organisations as well as the private and commercial sectors to enhance access and inclusion for people with disability.

It is important that any new scheme strengthens local government's capacity to work in collaboration and partnership to enhance access and inclusion for people with disability.

- **Planning and coordination of services for people with disability and their carers in partnership with community organisations, and relevant government agencies**

Penrith Council's knowledge about local needs and its strong relationships with mainstream and specialised community organisations including government agencies has been essential to the effective planning and coordination of services for people with disability and their carers.

The responsibilities of the Disability Access Officer and Disability Services Officer include leadership and support of the Regional Disability Forum. Their roles also include identifying emerging issues, service gaps and needs and planning for regional and local service enhancements with ADHC.

Penrith Council also supports mainstream and disability organisations in the local community by providing well located, accessible and subsidised accommodation in its Community Connections Building within the Penrith City Centre. The Community Connections facility provides a one-stop shop location for a range of local service providers.

- **Facilitating the development of public and private infrastructure that is accessible, safe and supports mobility**

Council's annual funding of a Disability Access Improvement Program has provided leverage for funding and resource contributions from across Council to enhance accessibility to Council facilities including Neighbourhood Centres and the Civic Centre. This includes physical infrastructure enhancements for older facilities as well as driving innovative service improvements. This program has been in place since 2003 and has been very successful in driving sustainable access improvements across the City. A good example of this is Council's Access Maps for the Penrith City Centre and St Marys Town Centre. The program has also provided funds for accessible toilets, ramps, handrails, TGSi, signage, hearing loops and adaptive technology in the Council libraries.

- **Providing information, referral and advocacy services to assist people with disability and their carers to navigate the system.**

People with disability and their carers require information about mainstream and specialised services in the community. Council maintains a Community Services Directory which is available in hard copy as well as on Council's website. Council also has two positions, a Disability Access Officer and Disability Services Officer who work with residents, service providers, community organisations and government departments in responding to the needs of people with disability and their carers.

The provision of information, referral and advocacy services will be an important component in an improved scheme that provides increased choices and opportunities for people with disability and their carers. Councils have the capacity to provide enhanced services in this area with appropriate government support.

- **Improving service delivery**

Local councils contribute to improving service delivery in a number of ways. For example the work undertaken by local councils through community capacity building and development across diverse groups is important to improving accessibility and social inclusion. This role is particularly important when considering the coordination of systems and services between the aged and disability sectors.

Penrith Council's support of community participation in decision making and the development of community networks are also important mechanisms to inform improvements in service delivery.

- **Enhancing opportunities for the full participation in community life by people with disability**

One example of Penrith Council's leadership and innovative contribution to the promotion of full community participation is the Disability Arts and Culture project. This project is a collaborative project involving Accessible Arts NSW, local disability organisations and Council to increase arts and cultural opportunities for people with disability in the Penrith area. Government support for innovative projects at the local level would assist in creating more opportunities and choices for people with disability.