

**UNESCAP QUESTIONNAIRE 2001 – AUSTRALIA’S REPORT TO THE UNITED
NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE
PACIFIC AT THE END OF THE DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS**

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Introduction

Australia has a complex and well-developed social protection system in place that is designed to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate both socially and economically within the community.

Key features of our system include:

- Comprehensive income security coverage;
- Access and equity framework;
- Legal framework to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities, their families and carers;
- Comprehensive health care system;
- Rehabilitation framework;
- Flexible employment systems to meet a variety of needs;
- Free state education systems which include supports for students with disabilities and special education for those who cannot attend a main stream school; and
- Extensive prevention and early intervention strategies.

Community consultation is an important feature of the Australian policy development process.

Key Social Pressures

Australia, like most industrialised countries, is experiencing an ageing of its population. This is already beginning to place some pressure on government spending. However, much larger pressures are expected to emerge when the ‘baby-boomer’ generation starts reaching old age in the middle of the next decade.

This is likely to create escalating growth in three key social areas, health, aged care and age pensions. Health spending will increase because the population is ageing, but more importantly, because people want and expect access to the latest medical advancements.

Despite strong economic growth in Australia, many in our society are still at the margins of the labour market and society for a variety of reasons. Some people have difficulty remaining in employment while others have difficulty taking advantage of labour market opportunities, without additional help.

Addressing welfare dependence among Australians of working age is the focus of ongoing welfare reform initiatives. New approaches are being tested and findings from longitudinal research are informing the development of new policies and programs. There are inevitable trade-offs between targeting those most in need and

investing in early intervention and prevention measures within the limited resources available to meet the needs of an ageing population.

The Australian Parliamentary Structure

Since 1901, Australia has had a federal system of government with origins in the British system of government and law. The Constitution established a Commonwealth Government with specific powers. There are six States and two Territories, each of these has a Parliament. Responsibility for social protection is divided between the Commonwealth and the State/Territory Governments.

The three levels of Government contained within this complex structure are involved in the provision of disability services in Australia.

Disability and Carers in Australia

More than 3.6 million Australians, or 19 percent of the population have a disability. Of these 6 percent have a severe or profound disability.

Over the past five years the Commonwealth Government has spent \$37.8 billion on income support and services for people with disabilities and carers. In 2001-02 it spent \$6.98 billion on income support for people with disabilities. Income support to carers in 2001-02 totalled \$1.24 billion. There are 2.3 million carers in Australia.

1. NATIONAL COORDINATION

Commonwealth Government Social Policy Framework

The Commonwealth Government's desired outcome for people with disabilities is full inclusion in all aspects of community life. The Government's vision for Australia is a society where all Australians can live, work and participate fully in community life.

The Government is committed to widening opportunities for independence, access and participation. The Government provides a range of opportunities and supports to ensure that people with disabilities are empowered to achieve their full economic and social potential.

The principles underpinning the Australian policy framework are designed to:

- Provide assistance to help people with disabilities participate effectively and fully in social and economic life;
- Ensure that safety net income support arrangements are in place to support people with disabilities who cannot work; and
- Ensure all levels of government appropriately assist people with disabilities, their families and carers.

The Australian Government is currently undertaking a number of wide-ranging social policy reforms. The objective of *Welfare Reform* is to increase economic participation and social engagement, while maintaining an effective social safety net. These reforms aim to increase community engagement and reduce social exclusion with a focus on individualised assistance and early intervention.

Australians Working Together is the first step in the path of a longer term, whole of Government approach to achieve the right balance between incentives, obligations and assistance in the social policy framework (see Section 7- *Australians Working Together*).

National Disability Advisory Council

The National Disability Advisory Council was established on the International Day of Disabled Persons, 3 December 1996. The Council was established to strengthen the links between Government and the disability field and to work with the Minister for Family and Community Services to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The Council provides consumer views to the Government. The Council includes people with personal experience of disability, people with experience as carers, and service providers.

The National Disability Advisory Council is Australia's national coordination committee on disability for UNESCAP.

Ongoing challenges and priorities for the Council include:

- Providing advice on key issues under consideration by Government;
- Participating in the development of the revised Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement;
- Providing Government with advice on welfare reform initiatives;
- Consulting with State/Territory disability advisory bodies and national disability peak bodies to progress joint activities and promote the interests of people with disabilities;
- Provide expert advice and encourage stakeholders to progress the work on establishing Standards under the Disability Discrimination Act (see Section 2 of this report);
- Supporting the establishment of the National Indigenous Disability Network and seek opportunities to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are carefully considered in policy development and implementation;
- Continue to highlight and progress discussion on key intersection issues including those of health care, ageing and disability; and
- Promote a whole of Government approach to disability issues.

The State and Territory Governments have also established advisory committees to advise their Ministers on matters that relate to the work undertaken within their own jurisdictions. Council works with these committees to strengthen the links between all levels of Government.

Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement

The Ministers responsible for disability services usually meet annually to discuss disability issues of a national focus. These issues are generally related to the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA). Under the Agreement the Commonwealth Government is responsible for the provision of employment services for people with disabilities and the State and Territory

Governments are responsible for managing accommodation and related support services. The second Agreement was due to expire in June 2002 and has currently been extended while the Ministers negotiate a third Agreement which will cover 2002-2007.

The third CSTDA will be based on a multilateral and bilateral agreement structure. The multilateral agreement will provide the national framework for the provision of disability services while the bilaterals will help governments target local issues such as transitions between service types and levels of government, improving the system on the ground for people with disabilities.

The third CSTDA will have a greater emphasis on accountability and transparency and will include improved reporting requirements.

Commonwealth Government Responsibilities

The Commonwealth provides a range of income support measures specifically for people with disabilities and for carers. By far the most significant of these in terms of expenditure is the Disability Support Pension (DSP). Like the rest of the social security system (at the Commonwealth level), DSP payments are means tested and made up from general taxation revenue rather than through insurance-based arrangements.

In March 2002, there were 652,000 customers on Disability Support Pension with expenditure reaching \$6.4billion.

Disability Support Pension is paid to people who are unable to work, or be re-skilled for work for at least the next two years because of a disability. It is intended to ensure that people with disabilities have adequate levels of income and maximum opportunities to participate in society.

People who do not qualify for disability-specific payments may be eligible for other forms of income support, such as unemployment benefits.

There are two kinds of Commonwealth financial assistance that may be available in a caring situation. Carer Payment provides income support to people who, because of the demands of their caring role, are unable to support themselves through substantial workforce participation. Carer Payment is subject to income and assets tests and is paid at the same rate as other social security pensions. A person cannot receive Carer Payment and another social security income support payment at the same time.

Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment that is available to people who provide daily care and attention at home for an adult or child with a disability or chronic medical condition. Carer Allowance is not income or assets tested and is not treated as income for taxation purposes. It can be paid in addition to a social security income support payment.

The Commonwealth also manages a wide range of programs designed to assist people with disabilities into employment. These programs are funded by the Commonwealth and mostly delivered through service providers in the voluntary and private sectors, with vocational rehabilitation assistance delivered through the Commonwealth agency, Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service, Australia.

The Commonwealth provides assistance for people with hearing impairments through the Office of Hearing Services. The Office can provide eligible people with vouchers for free hearing assessments, hearing rehabilitation and selection and fitting of hearing aids and other devices. Customers may also receive maintenance of their aid(s) (including regular supplies of batteries) and advice on how to make the best use of their aid(s) and how to manage their hearing loss. Additional services are available to people who have severe or profound hearing loss.

State/Territory Government Responsibilities

State and Territory Governments have responsibility for the planning, policy setting and management of specialist disability services except employment services. The States and Territories are primarily responsible for providing accommodation support services, respite care services and community access programs such as day programs.

Compensation for personal injury resulting from workplace and motor vehicle accidents is paid under State/Territory legislation that makes it compulsory for employers and motorists to insure against these contingencies.

2. LEGISLATION

Australia has both national and State/Territory legislation to address discrimination against people with disabilities. There are also a number of Acts that promote the rights of people with disabilities both at a Commonwealth and State/Territory level.

Disability Discrimination Legislation

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) came into force in 1993. It prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability, both against the person with a disability and their associates such as family members, carers and friends. It contains a broad definition of disability and covers many areas of life, including employment, education, access to premises, administration of Commonwealth laws and programs and provision of goods, services and facilities.

There is an extensive system in place to ensure that any alleged infringements of the Act are investigated and resolved. This includes the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), a national independent statutory Government body, the Federal Court of Australia and the Federal Magistrates Service. In addition to its investigation function, HREOC has wide-ranging education and public awareness responsibilities and conducts public inquiries.

The State and Territory Governments also have anti-discrimination legislation in place, under which people are also entitled to have their complaints investigated and resolved. As a Commonwealth law, the DDA overrides State and Territory legislation to the extent of any inconsistency.

Disability Standards

The DDA also allows disability standards to be formulated in the following areas:

- Employment;
- Education;

- Public transport services;
- Access to premises;
- Accommodation; and
- Administration of Commonwealth laws and programs.

The purpose of disability standards is to spell out in greater detail the rights and obligations under the DDA, providing greater certainty about the Act's requirements.

Work has proceeded on a number of disability standards over the past years. The standard on public transport services came into effect in late 2003. (For more details see Section 5 of this Report).

Commonwealth Disability Strategy

The Commonwealth Disability Strategy (CDS) was established in 1994 as a planning framework to assist Commonwealth organisations to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The CDS was evaluated in 1999 and a refined CDS was launched in 2000. The refined Strategy includes a performance management framework. It identifies the five roles of government: policy adviser, regulator, purchaser, service provider and employer and contains performance indicators and measures designed to assist Commonwealth organisations focus on disability issues in every aspect of their work and remove barriers to access for people with disabilities.

Commonwealth organisations are required to report their progress in implementing the Strategy in their annual reports. Initial findings from an analysis of the first year of implementation of the CDS indicate that the Commonwealth agencies are generally fairing well in meeting the CDS requirements. These early findings however also show the need for further attention by some agencies.

The refined Strategy will be independently evaluated in 2004.

Legal Aid

The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments provide legal aid services to people with disabilities through the Legal Aid Program and the Commonwealth Community Legal Services Program (CCLSP). The primary function of legal aid is to provide legal assistance to people who are unable to afford the cost of private legal services.

Among other types of legal assistance, the CCLSP also funds a network of disability discrimination legal services. There is a specialist disability discrimination legal service in each State and Territory.

3. INFORMATION

The Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Australian Bureau of Statistics is Australia's national data collection agency. It undertakes a range of national surveys to assist policy development across all governments and the private sector.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts regular surveys of disability, ageing and carers every five years. The last survey was conducted in 1998 and the next survey will be undertaken in 2003. These surveys provide information on age, gender, living arrangements, education and labour force experience of people with disabilities, social participation and their need for, and receipt of, assistance with a range of ordinary life activities.

The last survey shows that in 1998, 3.6 million people in Australia had a disability (19% of the total population). A further 3.1 million (16% of total population) had an impairment or long-term condition that did not restrict their everyday activities. Of those with a disability, 87% (3.2 million) experienced specific restrictions in core activities, schooling or employment.

There has been a steady rise in the underlying disability rate since the first disability survey in 1981. After adjusting for changes between surveys and in the age distribution of the population, the rate has increased from 15% in 1981 to 19% in 1998. This is underpinned by a growth in the proportion of those with specific restriction from 10% to 16% in the same period. The greater part of the increase between 1993 and 1998 is for people with severe and profound restrictions (ABS 1999).

Health and Welfare Data

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is Australia's national agency for health and welfare data collection and analysis. The Institute publishes a variety of publications on issues pertaining to people with disabilities. These include:

- A biennial report titled *Australia's Welfare*, providing an overview of welfare provisions across Australia.
- *Commonwealth/State/Territory Disability Agreement Minimum Dataset*, in cooperation with the States, Territories and the Commonwealth, outlining welfare provisions provided by State and Territory and Commonwealth Governments.
- Reports on the definition of disability in Australia, and the definition and prevalence of intellectual and physical disability and acquired brain injury.
- Commissioned research on various national issues relating to people with disabilities for the National Disability Administrators.

The Institute is also a collaborating body for the World Health Organisation Family of Classifications.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Data Collection

The *Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreement Minimum Dataset Collections* are conducted under the auspices of the National Disability Administrators. This data has been collected from each State and Territory to provide a cohesive dataset since 1995. The purpose of the minimum dataset is to facilitate the

exchange of information between jurisdictions, by the design and use of standard core data items and agreed definitions.

The survey provides information on the needs of people with disabilities to assist with planning support services. Carer information is also collected to indicate how much of this assistance is provided by family and friends.

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS

State and Territory Government Promotional Activities

The State and Territory Governments undertake a range of promotional activities to raise community awareness of disability issues. These activities vary across the States and Territories, and funding is provided for:

- peak bodies to raise awareness of disability issues; and
- broad based campaigns designed to raise community awareness of disability issues.

United Nations International Day of People with a Disability – 3 December

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) has provided sponsorship support and generates community awareness and participation in International Day activities around Australia.

This sponsorship has been provided to NICAN, a community based disability information service, to coordinate a range of community based activities to celebrate International Day, including a photographic exhibition featuring people with disabilities. Activities are also conducted in each State/Territory in conjunction with FaCS State/Territory offices.

Government, Business and Community Partnership

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services manages the annual *Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Awards*, which recognises Australian businesses that employ people with disabilities and promote the benefits of employing them. The Awards also promote the efforts of Commonwealth funded employment agencies that place and support people with disabilities in employment.

There is strong support for the Awards by employer organisations throughout Australia, including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Council of Small Business organisations, Australian Business Limited, the Committee for Economic Development of Australia and all State and Territory Chambers of Commerce. The Awards are also supported through business partnerships with major sponsors.

Another mechanism for encouraging partnership has been the *Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership*, a consultative board appointed to advise and assist the Government on the development of community business collaboration.

The *Partnership* acts as a 'think-tank' on matters of Corporate Social Responsibility, to promote mutual obligation and to encourage and foster the development of

partnerships, to ensure that all Australians benefit economically, socially, culturally and environmentally.

5. ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Access to Public Transport

New Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport, and accompanying Guidelines under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) were passed by parliament in 2002. The standards will make public transport more accessible for people with disabilities.

The drafting and implementation of these Standards is the result of a strategic approach over the past 20 years, and is an excellent example of government, business and disability groups working together to establish effective ways to eliminate discrimination.

The Standards will help to promote greater independence and a correspondingly better quality of life for people with a disability, the elderly and parents with young children.

The Standards set out specific requirements for the accessibility of public transport and provide transport operators with detailed information about disability access issues, including such things as access paths, manoeuvring areas, ramps and boarding devices.

Access to Premises

An amendment to the DDA to add the power to formulate a disability standard in relation to access to premises that the public are entitled to enter or use came into effect on 13 April 2000.

The Building Access Policy Committee, which advises the Australian Building Codes Board, is working to develop a Standard, which will harmonise the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Building Code of Australia. This will provide certainty and clarity of obligations and expectations for both stakeholders and the wider community.

The Committee comprises representatives of the disability community, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the building industry, business and representatives from Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

On 10 January 2002 the Board released a Directions Report outlining the progress and future directions of the work of the Committee. The Board also hosted a series of public information sessions in February/March 2002. It is expected that a draft Standard will be released for public consultation in 2003.

Access to Education

Since 1995, the Commonwealth has worked in close collaboration with State and Territory education jurisdictions and a range of other stakeholders, including the disability sector, to develop Education Standards under the DDA. The purpose of the

Standards is to clarify the rights of students with disabilities to receive, and the obligations of providers to supply, education and training free from discrimination.

The development of the Education Standards has been a complex process requiring consideration of a range of legal and financial issues. The Commonwealth will continue to work with the States and Territories, and other stakeholders to introduce the Standards in the near future.

Accessible Information

National Relay Service

The Commonwealth Government provides funding for a range of initiatives designed to provide accessible information for people with disabilities. The National Relay Service provides services to enable people who are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, to use the telephone. A human relay operator converts text conversation to voice and relays the voice caller's conversation in text.

In December 2000, the world's first national text-based emergency call service was launched as a part of the National Relay Service.

Radio Services for the Print Handicapped

Radio Services for the Print Handicapped (RPH) is a community broadcasting service that has a beneficial impact on the lives of people with disabilities. The RPH Australia network of stations provides a vital radio service that meets the needs of people who cannot access printed material for a variety of reasons.

With over 10% of the Australian population suffering a print disability, almost 2 million individuals cannot access printed material. RPH Australia provides and facilitates access to a wide range of printed material, reading directly from the daily major newspapers, magazines, brochures, books and more.

The Network is established across Australia, broadcasting free to air to all major capital cities and an increasing number of regional centres. 80% of the Australian population lives within the RPH Australia network area.

The Government Online Strategy

The Commonwealth Government is also looking at ways to ensure that online information and services are more accessible. *The Government Online Strategy* requires all Commonwealth Government agencies to comply with a set of online standards, including accessibility. This standard requires Commonwealth websites to meet the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, to ensure that people with a disability, or people with poor Internet connections, are able to access online information.

Copyright

The Australian Copyright Act includes a number of provisions dealing specifically with allowing the reproduction of material in accessible formats for people with disabilities.

The Copyright Act sets out a licence whereby certain educational institutions and institutions assisting people with a print or intellectual disability may make multiple reproductions and communications of certain copyright material for education purposes or for use in the provisions of assistance to persons with a print or intellectual disability. Importantly, recent reforms to the Australian copyright regime extended the statutory licence for institutions assisting people with a disability to allow for the reproduction of material into accessible digital formats and the electronic dissemination of such formats.

AccessAbility Program

The Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts administered the AccessAbility program. The objective of the program was to promote the development of innovative solutions to overcoming the barriers to using online services that are presented by a person's disabilities. Funding allocations have favoured best-practice models with the potential for wide implementation.

The program was targeted towards people whose disabilities impede their access to mainstream online services, rather than to people with disabilities in general. Access difficulties might arise where people with particular disabilities do not have access to necessary hardware or software interfaces, specialised training or support, or appropriately accessible Web content.

Nineteen projects were funded by the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts as a part of this program in 1998/99 and fourteen projects were funded in 1999/2000. All projects were completed in early 2002.

Licensed Broadcasting Captioning

Regulations made under the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA) require the holders of commercial television broadcasting licences and national broadcasters to caption television programs transmitted during prime viewing hours (6pm to 10.30pm) and television news programs and television current affairs programs transmitted at any time, with limited exceptions. The captioning standards apply to both analogue and digital transmissions and came into effect in metropolitan areas on 1 January 2001 and will be introduced progressively in regional areas before 31 December 2003.

6. EDUCATION (see also Section 5)

The States and Territories of Australia have responsibility for the provision of education. All States and Territories have legislation to ensure that all students and youth, including those with disabilities, receive an adequate education.

The Commonwealth also has a role in improving access to education for Australians with a disability through the development of Education Standards under the DDA. Work is proceeding on the development of these Standards which when formulated will:

- Provide detailed guidance on the provisions under the DDA to assist providers in the design, provision and targeting of their services for students with disabilities;

- Promote consistency across education systems in the level of services provided to students with disabilities;
- Ensure better understanding and more realistic expectations of the entitlements of students with disabilities; and
- Lead to a reduction in the need for dispute and litigation by providing a common ground of understanding and expectations for providers and users of services.

Under Australia's disability discrimination legislation, education authorities, institutions and providers are obliged to provide the service and facilities necessary to ensure that all students with disabilities can participate in education and training without discrimination.

The State and Territory Governments have also established a range of initiatives to:

- Bridge the gap between school and work for students with disabilities;
- Better include children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schooling in addition to children with other disabilities; and
- Enhance structures and processes to support learning and development of staff who work with, or on behalf of students with disabilities.

People with disabilities can also access places in vocational education institutions and universities, which are the joint responsibility of the State/Territory and Commonwealth Governments.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

There has been an increase in participation in VET by people who reported a disability from 38,968 (2.0% of all VET participants) in 1995 to 62,100 (3.5% of all VET participants) in 2000. The number of people with a disability in New Apprenticeships has risen from 1,000 (0.8% of the total) in 1995 to 5,600 (2.0% of the total) in 2000.

In June 2000, Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers of vocational education and training endorsed *Bridging Pathways: a National Strategy and Blueprint for People With a Disability in Vocational Education and Training (VET) for 2000-2005*, with the aim of increasing opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities in this area. This strategy identifies actions at national, State and Territory level to increase educational opportunities for people with disabilities.

The *Blueprint* focuses on specific areas including:

- Increasing the availability of learning supports, such as sign language, for people with disabilities in the VET sector;
- Increasing the capacity of training providers and industry to include people with a disability in VET through professional development; and
- Providing accessible information about training and supports to people with disabilities and market the value of employing people with a disability to employers.

An *Australian Disability Training Advisory Council*, which includes representatives from Government and disability organisations, was established to monitor the implementation of the Blueprint and provide advice on emerging issues affecting access, participation and outcomes for people with a disability in VET. The relevant Commonwealth Departments and State and Territory Training Authorities report on progress towards achieving the activities in the Blueprint.

7. TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

The Commonwealth Government has a range of programs in place to promote flexibility and innovation to meet individual needs in the training and employment areas.

Employer Incentives

The Employer Incentives Strategy was established in 1997 with the goal of assisting and encouraging employers to employ people with a disability.

The aims of the Strategy are to:

- Stimulate commitment by senior management in organizations to employ people with a disability;
- Fund company specific placement officers to open up the company recruitment base to people with disabilities;
- Fund recruitment coordinator services to link a wide range of corporate employers with disability employment agencies and ensure that placement agencies understand the recruitment processes of those companies; and
- Set fair wages for people who are unable to work at full rates of productivity in the open workforce.

The Employer Incentives Strategy comprises five program initiatives:

- *The Workplace Modifications Scheme* provides employers with financial assistance for workplace modifications and/or the purchase of special or modified equipment for people with disabilities;
- *The Wage Subsidy Scheme* provides financial incentives to employers to employ workers with a disability under normal labour market conditions;
- *Special Employment Placement Officer* initiative provides funding to establish specialist positions within major private sector and industry organizations to improve employment prospects for people with a disability in these organizations;
- *Disability Recruitment Coordinator Services* provide larger employers with a single contact point for the recruitment of people with disabilities and provide a linkage between employers and disability employment services; and
- *The Supported Wage System* provides pro-rata wage assessments for people with a disability who are not fully productive in open employment.

Disability Employment Assistance

The Commonwealth Government funds over 800 disability employment service outlets across Australia to provide employment assistance to eligible job seekers with a disability who have ongoing support needs in work.

There are broadly two types of service – open employment services and business services.

- Open employment services aim to provide training, job placement and on-the-job support for people with a disability (or to assist the self-employed) in the open labour market.
- Business services (also known as “supported” employment services and formerly known as “sheltered workshops”) support the paid employment of people with disabilities. These services may also provide broad living skills to support workers.

In addition to disability employment assistance services, the Commonwealth also funds the provision of vocational rehabilitation for people with disabilities and injuries (see section 9).

The Government is currently undertaking a number of Disability Employment Service reforms to improve employment outcomes for people with a disability and to ensure viable, quality services, flexibility and choice for people with a disability.

In undertaking these reforms, the Government is committed to working in partnership with providers, consumers and their families and carers. It is expected that with the implementation of the reforms over the next 3 years there will result in significant benefits to people with disabilities.

Prime Minister’s Employer of the Year Awards

See entry under Section 4 - Public Awareness.

Australians Working Together

The *Australians Working Together (AWT)* package was announced in the 2001-02 Budget. The Government is investing A\$1.7 billion in the AWT package. The new system will provide improved personalised assessment and service and more opportunities for training and work experience. It will also provide better incentives and encouragement for people to increase their earnings and to meet reasonable requirements for people to find work or contribute to their communities. People with disabilities are identified as a priority for assistance under the AWT package which includes additional opportunities in the areas of education, training and employment.

Features of the AWT include: *Working Credit* to encourage people to take up jobs by providing financial incentives; more flexible and better integrated employment services; a new *Personal Support Programme* to provide personalised assistance to people who need it most; and a new *Transition to Work Programme* to help parents, carers and mature age job seekers return to the workforce.

To date, assessment of a person’s ability to work (used to determine eligibility for disability-related income support payments, and exemptions from activity test requirements for unemployment payments) in Australia has been based on the opinion

of the person's treating doctor, with further assessment by an independent medical examiner where required. Under AWT, a more holistic approach to work capacity assessment has been adopted, using a broader range of professional expertise. Treating doctors will continue to provide information about a person's medical condition, but other professionals such as psychologists, occupational therapists and rehabilitation counsellors will provide expert advice about the impact of a person's medical conditions on their ability to work. These assessors will also help to identify key barriers to participation, and will be able to recommend interventions, such as rehabilitation and employment assistance, to address those barriers.

Personal Advisers will provide individually tailored assistance and conduct participation interviews to identify appropriate participation options based on the customer's individual circumstances. A Personal Adviser will take into account customers' particular goals and aspirations, their existing skills and education, their health and other personal circumstances, their family situation and caring responsibilities

Over the next four years the Government will spend A\$177 million on a better deal for people with disabilities through the provision of the following:

- Better assessment processes to assess people's capacity to work, and referral to early interventions and assistance for people with disabilities, to help build their work capacity.
- 7000 new disability employment assistance places providing additional opportunities in business services and open employment for rural and remote locations and in areas of high demand in addition to the previously planned growth of 5000 places.
- About 5200 additional places in vocational education and training for students with disabilities.
- Support for over 1500 students with disabilities in higher education.
- Disability Coordination Officers to help people with disabilities move between school, vocational education and training, higher education and employment.
- An internationally accredited system to make sure disability employment assistance services deliver quality outcomes.

In addition, the Government will spend A\$73 million on employment assistance and rehabilitation places for parents and mature age people as part of the AWT. This will involve the creation of a further 5300 disability employment assistance places and 11,000 rehabilitation places to help parents and mature age workers with disabilities.

8. PREVENTION OF CAUSES OF DISABILITIES

Injury Prevention

Injury prevention and control was endorsed as a national health priority by Australian Health Ministers in 1986 in recognition of the national burden of injury.

The *Strategic Injury Prevention Partnership*, a sub-committee of the *National Public Health Partnership*, has been formed to oversee the development of the *National Injury Prevention Plan: Priorities for 2001-2003*. The Partnership will also provide advice on future directions for injury prevention. Australian Health Ministers have

endorsed the *National Injury Prevention Plan*. The *Strategic Injury Prevention Partnership* comprises representatives of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, health professionals and consumers.

Four injury areas are identified as priorities under the *National Injury Prevention Plan: Priorities for 2001-03*. These are:

- falls in older people;
- falls in children;
- drowning; and
- poisoning in children.

These areas have been chosen based on evidence of injury burden and potential gains, effectiveness, cost benefit, acceptability of a range of interventions and a clear and actionable role for the health sector.

The Plan identifies strategies, actions, better practice and evidence-based interventions to assist in reducing injuries in these four priority areas including a number of immediate actions by the health sector. It recommends a focus on coordination of work in these areas across jurisdictions and on identifying partnership opportunities across sectors.

Mental Health

The Australian network for promotion prevention and early intervention for mental health, AUSEINET, is developing networks for promoting evidence based practice.

The MindMatters initiatives contain a suite of programs provided to schools to develop a whole school approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention. It aims to enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful. It includes support materials for young people who have high support needs and assists the school in engaging the families.

The Mindframe National Media Strategy has been developed to encourage the print and electronic media to report responsibly about mental illness and suicide. It contains printed resources, quick reference cards and a web site to provide information to the media when reporting.

Community Life will provide a national support structure for community capacity building for suicide prevention.

A resource kit has been developed to assist consumers of mental health services and their carers in advocating for the rights of those disabled by mental illness.

The National Mental Health Strategy

One in five Australians will experience mental illness. The *National Mental Health Strategy* adopted by all Health Ministers in April 1992, set directions for the reform of Australia's mental health services.

The *National Mental Health Strategy* is coordinated by the *National Mental Health Working Group*, which consists of State and Territory and Commonwealth officials, mental health service providers and mental health consumers. The aim of the Strategy is to:

- promote the health of the Australian community;
- where possible, prevent the development of mental health problems and mental disorders;
- reduce the impact of mental disorders on individuals, families and the community; and
- assure the rights of people with mental disorders.

Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service

The Department of Veterans' Affairs through its *Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service* provides specialist care to veterans and their families in areas such as youth suicide prevention and post traumatic stress disorders. Working with the *Australian Centre for Post-traumatic Mental Health*, the Department of Veterans' Affairs accesses up to date research on a range of mental health needs of veterans and other service personnel.

Road Safety

The *National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010* was adopted by the Australian Transport Council in November 2000. The Council comprises Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers with transport responsibility and includes an observer from local government. The Strategy provides a framework which complements the road safety strategies of State, Territory and Local governments.

The target of the strategy is to reduce the annual number of road fatalities per 100,000 population by 40%, from 9.3 in 1999 to no more than 5.6 in 2010. Achieving this target will save an estimated 3,500 lives by 2010.

HIV/AIDS

Australia's comprehensive national approach to responding to HIV/AIDS has long been regarded as being a world leader in the field. These strategies recognise a need for coordinated action in response to HIV. They aim to establish a partnership between affected communities, Governments at all levels and medical scientific and healthcare professionals. It expresses a commitment by the nation to the pursuit of two goals:

- Elimination of HIV; and
- Minimisation of the personal and social impacts of HIV infection.

New Born Screening for Hearing Impairment

The Commonwealth Government has recently established an early screening initiative which routinely screens all infants from new borns to 16 weeks. The Program is based

on research which indicates that babies who are diagnosed before the age of six months and who receive appropriate and consistent early intervention have significantly higher language levels than those children identified after the age of six months.

Significant permanent hearing impairment, if undetected will impede speech, language and cognitive development and, as a consequence, may impact on emotional and social well-being.

It is expected that with the implementation of this new initiative, the implications and costs associated with hearing impairment in infants will be reduced significantly and that the long term benefits will flow through, not only in the way of improved quality of life, but also in reducing the long term costs of health care for hearing impaired infants.

9. REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Commonwealth Government provides vocational rehabilitation services to Australian citizens or residents who have an injury, disability or health condition, and who with assistance, will be able to gain or retain unsupported paid employment. Vocational rehabilitation is delivered for the Commonwealth Government by CRS Australia, a Commonwealth Government service, through 160 units nationally.

Vocational rehabilitations provide:

- Holistic assessments of clients to identify specific vocational barriers;
- Programs developed to assist the individual to compensate for or manage their disability, or the limitations or restrictions imposed by it;
- Personal and vocational counselling; and
- Specialised job matching and placement, including workplace modification, job redesign or graduated return to work where required.

CRS Australia also provides occupational health and safety consultancy services to employers and career counselling services.

Hearing Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Hearing services to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be provided through the Australian Hearing Services network of hearing centres, or within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities under the Australian Hearing Specialist Program for Indigenous Australians. The focus is on providing tertiary level services, namely hearing assessment, supply and fitting of hearing devices if appropriate, and on prevention and community awareness and education.

State and Territory Government Rehabilitation initiatives

The State and Territory Governments have initiated a broad range of rehabilitation services to assist people with disabilities to integrate into society. Examples include programs to divert people with disabilities away from the justice system to meet the needs of minor offenders and assist them to be reintegrated with the community after they leave prison, and independent living centres designed to deliver in-patient services in a home-like environment.

10. ASSISTIVE DEVICES

The state and territory governments provide aids and appliances necessary to assist people with disabilities to live in their own homes through a range of programs. The types of equipment included under these programs include manual wheelchairs, power drive wheelchairs, wheeled walking aids, respiratory drainage tables, non-mobile commodes, hydraulic/electric mobile floor hoists and slings. Some of these programs also include provision of consumables such as continence aids and domiciliary oxygen, orthoses and surgical footwear are also subsidised.

Home and Community Care Program

The Home and Community Care (HACC) Program is a joint Commonwealth/State initiative which aims to provide a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated range of basic maintenance and support services for frail aged people, people with a disability and their carers, in order to enhance their quality of life and/or prevent their inappropriate admission to long term residential care. In 2002-03 the Commonwealth will contribute \$674.1 million of the \$1.1 billion total committed for the program.

The HACC Program is a central element of the Commonwealth Government's aged care policy, providing community care services to frail aged and younger people with disabilities, and their carers. The aim of the HACC Program is to enhance the independence of people in these groups and avoid their premature or inappropriate admission to long term residential care.

About 20% of Australia's population over the age of seventy use aged care services. HACC services support more than half of this group, with the remainder being cared for in nursing homes, hostels or through Community Aged Care Packages.

The primary objective of the HACC Program is to provide services to enhance the quality of life of frail aged and younger disabled people and their carers, enabling them to live as independently as possible in the community.

Veterans' Home Care is a similar service provided to eligible members of the veteran community. It aims to ensure veterans and war widows maintain optimal health, wellbeing and independence through the provision of domestic assistance, personal care and home and garden maintenance services.

Carer Respite and Resource Centres

In addition to financial assistance, the Government provides a range of other services to carers. Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres have been established around Australia to provide information to carers about community services, respite, counselling and possible financial entitlements.

Also, Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres provide carers with information about the availability of respite care (in-home, community and residential) within a carer's local area.

Continence Aids Assistance Scheme

The Continence Aids Assistance Scheme (CAAS) provides a subsidy to people with a permanent continence condition, and a permanent disability, to help defray the cost of managing their incontinence. CAAS assists people of working age i.e. aged 16-65 who receive the Disability Support Pension or Mobility Allowance. CAAS also assists a small number of people, who are aged 65 and over who are in paid work for at least 8 hours per week and who are eligible for income support. CAAS currently helps around 16,300 Australians with disabilities.

CAAS commenced on 1 January 1993, and was developed as a labour market programme, in response to consultations with the disability community, which indicated that the cost of continence aids presented a major barrier to the participation of people with disabilities in employment, education and training.

The Scheme is managed on a national basis and client numbers are growing at the rate of about 8% per year.

Hearing services

Under the Commonwealth Hearing Services Program, the Commonwealth of Australia provides a range of high quality hearing services predominantly to pensioners, part pensioners, eligible veterans and dependents of these people through a Voucher System. The Office of Hearing Services within the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing administers the Commonwealth Hearing Services Program, purchasing hearing services on behalf of the Government from a national network of private sector providers and Australian Hearing, the public provider.

The range of services available to clients includes hearing assessment, supply and fitting of hearing devices if required, advice and counselling on hearing matters and for a nominal annual fee, maintenance of hearing devices, including battery supply and repairs.

In addition, under the Australian Government's Community Service Obligations (CSOs) component of the Program, eligible special needs adults and all children and young adults less than 21 years of age can gain access to specialised free hearing services through Australian Hearing. Eligible special needs adult clients include those with complex hearing rehabilitation needs, eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and eligible clients residing in remote areas of Australia.

The Voucher System was introduced in November 1997. Expenditure has increased on average by around 7% per annum since 1998-99 to \$134 million in 2001-02. Funding provided to Australian Hearing in 2001-02 for CSOs, which includes a research component, was \$28.2 million compared with \$26.2 million in 1997-98.

In 2001-02 voucher hearing services were provided to around 350,000 adult clients, including about 85,000 hearing device fittings. The number of CSO clients in 2001-02 were estimated at over 41,000, including around 30,000 children and young adults.

11. SELF-HELP ORGANISATIONS

National Secretariat Program

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services provides financial support through the *National Secretariat Program* to a large number of peak community-based organisations in the family and community services area. These peak bodies represent the interests of the community in six broad areas: welfare, family, community, children, homelessness and disability.

Through this program, organisations receive funding to advise Government on policy matters and to provide information to constituents on Government policy.

Two tiers of organisations are funded through the program. National secretariats represent the combined interests of a particular sector. Secretariat support organisations receive less funding to represent the interests of particular groups within a sector.

In the disability sector, ACROD receives funding as the national secretariat representing the interests of service providers. Eight peak bodies, representing the interests of specific groups of people with disabilities within the disability sector receive secretariat support funding. These are:

- Physical Disability Council of Australia;
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance;
- Women With Disabilities Australia;
- Brain Injury Australia;
- National Council on Intellectual Disability;
- Deafness Forum of Australia;
- Australian Association of the Deaf; and
- Blind Citizens Australia.

Carers Australia is the peak body for Carers and receives funding through the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

A national secretariat, the *Australian Federation of Disability Organisations*, that represents the interest of the entire sector of people with disabilities is expected to be established in the near future. It will receive funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Mental Health Council of Australia

The *Mental Health Council of Australia* (MHCA) began functioning as the peak national forum for mental health in 1997-98. The purpose of the Council is to assist in the forging of partnerships between consumers, carers, non government service providers, as well as clinical service providers.

Over the last 5 years the Council has established a number of working groups and formalised its constitution. The Council's main objectives are to: provide advice on mental health matters to government; monitor and analyse national mental health

policy developments; and resource allocation processes as well as outcomes. Its purpose is also to provide a forum for discussion on mental health matters in order to stimulate interest in and provide information on matters of concern in both Australia and other countries. These objectives are hoped to have the following outcomes:

- promote consumer, carer and community participation in mental health matters, and to participate in the development of mental health internationally.

Advocacy Organisations

Under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement, advocacy is a shared responsibility of the Commonwealth and the State and Territory Governments. The State and Territory Governments manage their own programs that provide funding to a number of advocacy organisations.

12. REGIONAL COOPERATION

In December 1993 all member states of the UN adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Australia took an active role in the development of the Standard Rules and has met its reporting requirements in relation to its implementation.

Disability Services Ministers meetings

The Australian Ministers responsible for disability services have recently welcomed the participation of Papua New Guinea and New Zealand to their regular meetings. Through these meetings, Australia is able to share its extensive experience in the development of disability policy, and also gain an insight into the social policies of the other countries.

International Assistance

Australia was one of a number of OECD countries that made a voluntary financial contribution to the OECD project 'Transforming Disability into Ability: Policies to promote work and income security for disabled people'. This report is yet to be publicly released.

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services is responsible for a wide range of social policies and services that affect Australian society and the living standards of Australian families, communities and individuals. The Department's policy expertise and experience is made available to other countries through consultancies, capacity building and study tours.

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (International Branch) has worked with newly emerging states, to assist countries to develop and/or redesign their social assistance and social policy systems.

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services works closely with multilateral funding organisations, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, International Labour Organisation, United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Office of Project Services, to provide international best-practice

solutions directly to client Governments. In working with other countries, the Department's International Branch develops country-specific solutions that do not rely on ongoing external support.

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) is responsible for delivering Australia's official development assistance. In 2002-03 its budget is estimated to be around \$1.8 million. This development assistance is focused mainly on the Asia Pacific region.

In 2002-03 Australia will provide an estimated \$230 million of direct assistance for health to developing countries. Australian support for health will account for around 13 percent of overall aid expenditure.

In 2003-03 Australia will support health sector reforms and management at the national and local levels. Support will also be provided to strengthen service delivery and increase access for the poor to affordable services, including community based services. This will include:

1. Improved overall governance of health sector services, and in turn improved disability services;
2. Direct improvements to disability services, and
3. Improved outcomes for people living with a disability through components of broader development projects.

In 2001-02, Australia provided A\$1 304 842 directly to projects and programs to improve disability services. In addition, the Australian overseas aid program contributed significant funding to disability services through components embedded in broader development projects and programs.

This funding targets a wide range of disability services, and is provided both as bi-lateral and multilateral assistance. It includes: the provision of rehabilitation services to people with physical disabilities in Cambodia; support for psychiatric services in East Timor; support to the WHO for the development of a new mental health policy; training for surgeons to treat people with head and facial deformities in Vietnam; and, increasing access to quality affordable eye care services for disadvantaged people in Nepal. This list is not comprehensive and is presented to illustrate the range of activities AusAID supports.

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services has undertaken consultancy work in Argentina, Bulgaira, China, Hungary, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Russia, Thailand and the United Kingdom.