The Canberra Disability Review

People with Disabilities ACT Inc

Original writing and voices on disability for Canberra

Issue #7 - 2019

Independence & infrastructure

Light rail accessibility, your stories, independent living centre closure & more

Inside: Mental Health update, PWDACT Health project update, Royal Commission opinion, Light Rail accessibility update, closure of the Independent Living Centre, Vox Populi bumper stories and more.

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This is an opinion journal. The contents of The Canberra Disability Review do not necessarily reflect the views of People with DIsabilities ACT, the Editors, advertisers, funders, our staff or other contributors.

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Tell us your opinions

Welcome to the seventh edition of the Canberra Disability Review

Rachel Sirr, Executive Officer, People with Disabilities ACT

Welcome to the seventh edition of Canberra Disability Review.

Each person deserves an equal opportunity to work, live, travel, learn, socialise and participate. It sounds simplistic and logical, but in reality for many people with disabilities this is just not alwasy the case.

I meet people all around Canberra who are living with disabilities. For the most part, I find people's focus is not on their disability, but rather on ability. This is so encouraging.

For example, a lady with a walking-frame may be doing some groceries. A man with one arm is working in a busy takeaway shop. A young person with intellectual disabilities enjoys a swim at the local pool with his brother and carer. A man with MS runs his own busy local business. A person with Cerebral Palsy travels overseas to represent Australia in their sport. A blind person composes and records their own music, or plays in the local orchestra.

While it's true that things can be more difficult, I've found so many people with disabilities overcoming obstacles and living life to the full.

If this describes you - by doing, you so are helping break down barriers and stereotypes about disability.
But there is still more to do to become a more inclusive and less segregated society.

It would be remiss of me not to mention our being awarded late 2018 an ACT Chief Minister's Awards for Inclusion. Moreover, two of our staff, Robert Altamore and Paul Mugambi both a received individuals awards for their work in this space.

It was a humbling experience and a huge honour given the calibre of people and organisations at the Awards Ceremony at the National Museum of Australia.

PWDACT works across the full spectrum of disability issues and this year we will be reaching out to the public for your opinions on how things can improve in Canberra.

I want your feedback and views, so keep an eye on our social media feed when we put the call out and you could go in the draw to win a $50 shopping voucher as a thanks for your sharing your opinion.

$50 voucher draw for your views

In this edition I am so pleased to have a mini-bumper of a 'Vox Populi' section (voice of the people) with a range of interesting and in-depth interest stories, including a wheelchaired student pilot, Canberra's dancing for the disabled, horseriding, and more. We would love to feature more Canberrans in future eidtions, so please send us your stories and pictures to admin@pwdact.org.au

Also in this edition, you can find out how the Canberra light rail will be geared towards people with disabilities, as well as an opinion piece on the closure of the independent living centre, and an update on mental health within Canberra.

We also provide an update on our own health project – looking at ways people with disabilities can make better use of our health system. This project has highlighted to us the enthusiasm, passion, commitment and incredible knowledge already being applied every day in community organisations.

We want to thank for their involvement, including, to date, ACTCOSS, Capital Health Network, ADACAS, Advocacy For Inclusion, ACT Office for Disability, Health Care Consumers Alliance, ACT Human Rights Commission and Rebus Theatre.

We look forward to continuing our work with our network and building more relationships in 2019.

Finally, don't forget to take note of key upcoming dates for 2019 on our back page of this journal. We'd love to see you at one of our stakeholder events.

And of course, if there's a pertinent topic in Canberra that you'd like to see improve for people with disabilities, or if you have a story or opinion to share – please write to us at admin@pwdact.org.au

Warmest wishes,
Rachel

You're invited to join PWDACT.

Membership is free for individuals with a disability. Help build a stronger collective voice for people with disabilities in Canberra.

Visit owww.pwdact.org.au to find out more.

Closure of the Independent Living Centre

PWDACT Opinion piece

As we write this article, the ACT Independent Living Centre in Weston is in its last afternoon of service and will have closed its doors on Friday 11 January 2019. People with disabilities have lost another service. We are assured there are alternative arrangements in place but don't know how they will work.

It is often said that you don't know what you've got till you lose it. We think this is so with our independent living centre. In this case, the loss of this service is something that many of our members will not be aware of and will many will hear about for the first time by reading this article. Unfortunately, ILCs are one of these services about which we only think when we immediately need them. These times may be infrequent but they are important.

In the early 1980s one of the things that PWDACT fought for was an ACT independent living centre. It was then, as it is now, a simple concept, a place at which a person with a disability could, with the assistance of impartial staff, try and test a piece of equipment as an important step in making the decision whether to purchase or acquire the item. The hands-on experience combined with the advice of independent occupational therapists or staff provided reassurance that the choice you were about to make was the right one for you. An Independent Living Centre was thus a very practical service supporting 'choice and control' the two key elements of the NDIS.

The ACT Government, when advising PWDACT of the closure of the independent living centre, provided the following information:

Consumers will still be able to access information about assistive technology through a variety of local equipment suppliers and online websites. Those without access to the internet can obtain advice over the phone by calling 1300 885 886. Equipment trials and assessments with occupational therapists will be available at the Village Creek Centre and other locations. Whether these arrangements will deliver appropriate support for people who would have previously used the independent living centre will be revealed over time. However, one thing we can say for certain is that obtaining information from a supplier who may have a commercial interest, or from a website or via a telephone discussion is an inferior experience to a hands on demonstration with the guidance of an independent person.

PWDACT has joined with other ACT disability and advocacy organisations to respond to the closure of the independent living centre. We have pointed out that the centre's service is valued by people as a source of impartial advice on assistive technology and also by those who need to get a feel for the height, weight, stability, material strength and customisation potential of various pieces of equipment from different suppliers prior to purchasing it and that the independent living centre experience is one that is not easily replicated online or from a visit to a single supplier.

In particular, older people, who were most likely to need assistive technology, would keenly miss the more "personal approach" currently offered by the independent living centre service. It was also pointed out that the loss of the capacity to trial and to "touch and feel" the equipment would be to the detriment of consumers.

So another disability-proactive service has been lost. It is early days yet but there is uncertainty as to how this service gap will be filled. There is no guarantee that the disability services market generated by the NDIS will provide a solution or that a private sector provider can or will provide a service which is essentially a collective or non-market service.

PWDACT will work with our sector colleagues in discussions with the ACT Government on strategies to continue, enhance and improve the personal advice function which the independent living centre formerly performed for us.

PWDACT will work to ensure that people with disabilities can continue to make informed and safe choices towards the quality aids and equipment that they need.

Light Rail in Canberra

PWDACT Update

The light rail project continues as a project of significance in Canberra. Love it or hate it, it will change the way public transport happens in the heart of Canberra, particularly for those travelling from the far north in the upper reaches of Gungahlin. People with Disabilities ACT is actively interested in how the project develops, in particular, how accessible it will be.

Learning from the mistakes of past light rail projects elsewhere is key, such as the launch by the Queensland State Government which saw inaccessible light rail vehicles rolled out where people in wheelchairs could not fit through doors, or the Victorian Government which abolished appropriate supervision and assistance for blind people which led to at least one horrific accident where a blind man lost an arm and a leg.

What's happening in Canberra you may ask? How accessible is the light rail going to be? PWDACT has been assured by Canberra Metro Operations that all stops are being designed to be accessible via ramps to provide improved access for customers who require the use of mobility aids (wheelchairs, scooters or motorised vehicles), parents with prams and those who find using stairs difficult. PWDACT have also been assured there will be adequate [individual?] assistance.

Accessibility symbols will be located on the ground at each of the stops and on board the light rail for mobility aid users. Entry to the light rail will be almost level at every stop. The level will alter slightly, depending on the number of people onboard the light rail.

Emergency help points and closed circuit television, on board every vehicle and at each stop, are planned for people's safety. Passenger Information Displays will provide real time information relating to expected arrival times and if relevant, service interruptions. Public announcements will also be made, providing customers with service updates and safety information.

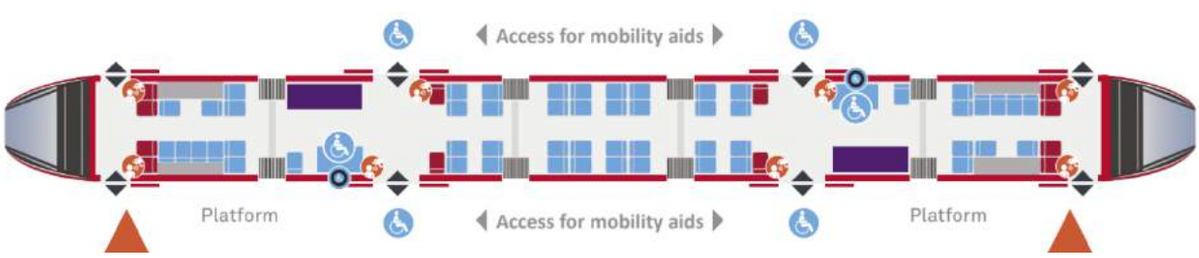
Hearing Loops are being installed at each stop and on board all of the light rail vehicles to assist those customers who have hearing aids. Braille lettering and raised pictograms are being installed at each stop on both the help point and the information pole. Similarly, braille lettering is planned on every entry and exit door button. A recorded public announcement will also assist visually impaired customers with information about the stop facilities.

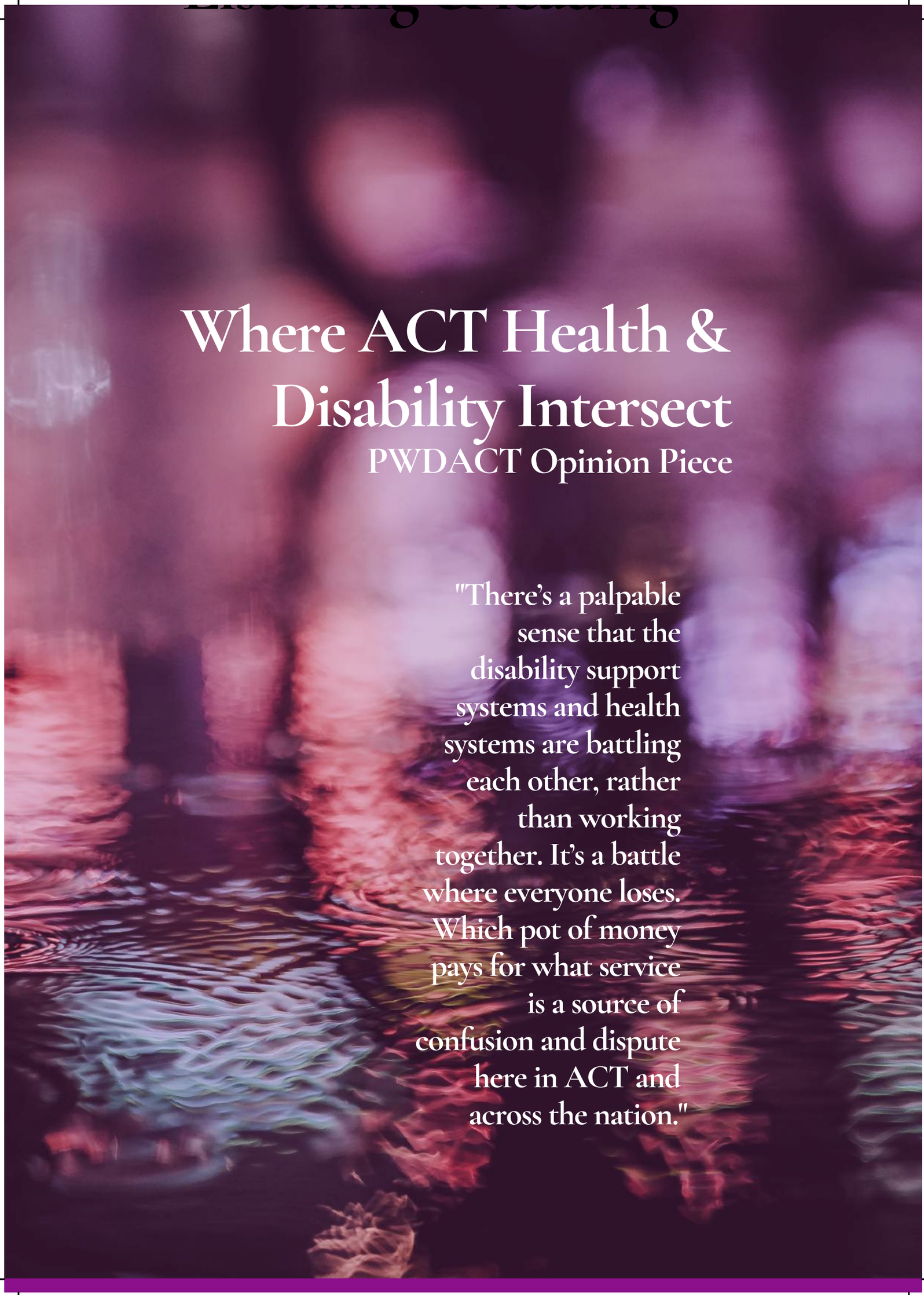
Customers who require assistance can wait in the designated area (there will be an accessibility marking on each platform). The Driver or Customer Service Officer (CSO) will then offer assistance with boarding, by placing the boarding ramp between the light rail vehicle and the platform.

Each light rail vehicle will have a designated space for customers with mobility aids or prams. A restraint will be available to secure the mobility aid in place.

To build confidence among customers with disabilities as well as other groups, Canberra Metro Operations will conduct a confidence day each year

PWDACT welcomes these initiatives and assurances. We look forward to the hands-on experiences we will have prior to Light Rail which will answer some of the outstanding questions.





Where ACT Health & Disability Intersect

PWDACT Opinion Piece

"There's a palpable sense that the disability support systems and health systems are battling each other, rather than working together. It's a battle where everyone loses. Which pot of money pays for what service is a source of confusion and dispute here in ACT and across the nation."

Where ACT Health & Disability Intersect - Canberra Disability Review #7

There's a palpable sense that the disability support systems and health systems are battling each other, rather than working together.

It's a battle where everyone loses. Which pot of money pays for what service is a source of confusion and dispute here in ACT and across the nation.

The design and origin of PWDACT's Health project came, in part, from the December 2017 issue of this Journal. The article, 'A Cure For Wellness' highlighted the gap between what was promised in disability and health, and the reality of the experiences for people in the ACT in accessing health services.

As our early article emphasised, the problems that exist for people with disabilities accessing suitable, respectful and timely healthcare services are significant.

Our feedback reminded us that whether it's a positive experience or a less-than-great experience (all the way through to downright terrible and completely unacceptable experiences), one of the things that makes the biggest difference is the culture and approach of the healthcare service, and the disability knowledge (or lack of it) is from the treating healthcare professionals.

Since July 2018, PWDACT has been undertaking the project focused on health and disability.

The project is funded by the NDIA Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) fund and is aimed at producing information and self-advocacy resources to support people with disabilities in ACT to access higher-quality healthcare services and outcomes.

To date, as part of our project we have produced resources around My Health Record, a key change in the legislation and operations of health care information for all Australians and one that has the potential to address some of the long-standing challenges of sharing information between different healthcare professionals.

Other areas we have focused on are the pathways for making complaints about the healthcare services you receive, more clearly establishing what health-focussed services the NDIA can fund vs what is expected to be delivered by ACT Health, and clarifying Medicare Items that relate specifically to people with disabilities.

However, it's important that we don't use this as a way of letting the systemic and organisational barriers be forgotten.Those great healthcare professionals who blend knowledge, empathy, doggedness and patience still operate within a wider healthcare system and under organisational pressures and structures. A good example is the interface between National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and State & Territory mainstream health systems, which is ACT Health in our case.

For participants, the NDIA cannot avoid the reality that there is some interplay between a health need and a disability – while not dependant on each other, a holistic view of a person's life would tell us that there is, more often than not, a relationship between the two.

Guiding documentation that has been released by Council of Australian Governments is fairly clear (to a certain degree), but the application of those guidelines on the ground is where people with disabilities are falling through the cracks.

Our project has highlighted to us the enthusiasm, passion, commitment and incredible knowledge already being applied every day in community organisations.

We want to thank for their involvement to date ACTCOSS, Capital Health Network, ADACAS, Advocacy For Inclusion, ACT Office for Disability, Health Care Consumers Alliance, ACT Human Rights Commission and Rebus Theatre.

We look forward to building our connections further this year.

Our work on this project has uncovered some insights that convince us that the ACT is on the right path to a responsive, accessible, person-centred health system for people with disabilities.

From a practical perspective, the ACT Health Consumer Feedback team have multiple methods of giving feedback about your healthcare experience. These methods already have a high degree of accessibility, and there is a commitment to find other ways of gathering feedback from individuals with disabilities.

There is lots of other work happening around the ACT (particularly the community sector) to address systemic and historic barriers to people with disabilities accessing high-quality healthcare. There is also commitment to unite and progress this work to hold government and health services to account in the coming years. PWDACT holds high hopes for the facilities and services provided by the new University Of Canberra Rehabilitation Hospital, and a focus on person-centred and holistic healthcare supports. Alongside these positive insights have come reminders that there is still a lot of work to do.

Our conversations with the Australian Digital Health Agency around My Health Record have highlighted that consultations with people with disabilities are still too often seen as an afterthought. Rates of employment of people with disabilities within the ACT Health system are still extremely low.

The interface between ACT Health and NDIS, which held so much hope for improving funded health supports related to a disability, remains complicated and confused for all involved.

There is enormous opportunity for health and wellness services such as gyms, leisure centres, swimming pools, pharmacies, dentists and dieticians to have significant impact in this area. Health starts well before individuals get to hospital

All of these insights, combined with the work undertaken before and since A Cure For Wellness in 2017, give us a fantastic foundation to continue delivering and advocating for support that gives all people with disabilities access to equitable, high-quality healthcare services.

To find out more, write to projects@pwdact.org.au

A Royal Commission Calling

PWDACT Opinion piece

At the Federal level, a push for a Royal Commission for institutional abuse of people with disabilities is front of mind across the nation for many. The renewed calls from Greens and Labor might well be heard, though it will take nine cross-benchers in favour to make this a reality. As this edition of our Journal goes to print, all of this is unfolding in the Parliament in Canberra. There are no reasons why we should not have Royal Commission specifically focused on institutional abuse of people with disabilities.

If we can have one into banks, it stands to reason we should have one to protect the most vulnerable in our society. It is a requirement of governments to uphold a just and civil society – and this means properly investigating and taking seriously the potential institutional abuse that has occurred among people with disabilities, with little recourse or place to see justice happen.

For carers and family alike, a Royal Commission would not only be welcomed, but relieving to know that the government is taking the issue seriously enough to properly and publicly examine it. This edition will outline some quick facts and figures on the Royal Commission issue, and get our readers up to speed.

People with Disabilities ACT is supportive of the government calling for a dedicated a Royal Commission into allegations of the abuse, neglect and violence against people with disability in institutional and residential settings.

A Royal Commission is the highest form of public inquiry on matters of public importance. And the care and safety of vulnerable citizens who risk being abused is of the highest importance. Any logical person and government would agree this to be true.

Late last year, Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John said he "would not rest" until the aged care royal commission was expanded to cover the disability sector, despite concerns this would "dilute" the effectiveness of the inquiry.

Steele-John fought back tears in the Senate chamber, as he unsuccessfully moved a motion to broaden the royal commission to include the abuse, neglect and violence against people with disability in institutional and residential settings.
vulnerable.

Such a dedicated Royal Commission is desperately needed. It is apparent that there is a complete lack of transparency and action when it comes to the handling of complaints of neglect and abuse of people with disabilities.

A cynic might take the view that governments, especially a Federal government trying to legitimise the NDIS as a comprehensive and "adequate" way of meeting the continuing support of those with a disability, do not want a Royal Commission pointing to serious funding shortfalls in caring for the disabled and elderly.

Yes – the Government has a hotline for complaints. The National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline (1800 880 052 and email hotline@workfocus.com) is a "free, independent and confidential service for reporting abuse and neglect of people with disability".

But the government has literally hundreds of hotlines, and this is just a way to capture information. It is not a point of action, and reports are not readily available.

What actually happens to the information? According to their website (https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/complaints/hotline), complaints get 'referred to the relevant agency'. To ordinary people, this sounds awfully like buck-passing. And to a large, complicated and often incompetent bureaucracy at that. There appears to be no centralised handling or analysis of information. And no watchdog. How much of the abuse and neglect that is reported is actually dealt with? How do we know how much goes undealt with?

What is needed is a clean sweep. This is precisely what a Royal Commission would achieve. It would be an appropriate and solid platform for people with disabilities, as well as their family, carers friends, and service providers to tell their stories. To speak up. And end the neglect. It would shine a spotlight on unacceptable and inappropriate behaviours, and seek to truly protect some of Australia's most vulnerable.

Mental Health services in Canberra

PWDACT Opinion piece

Confusion, disruption, distress and bureaucracy. These are words that seem to aptly describe the mental health system by the ANU centre for mental health research, according to a report by the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT which surveyed the sector.

If you or someone you know has suffered from a mental illness in Canberra, you will know this first-hand. With so many services offered, it's often a confusing struggle to even know where to turn to for help. The obvious initial point of advice is the GP, or reaching out to services such as Beyond Blue and Lifeline.

And it's a tricky subject with overlaps with health – at what point does mental illness become a disability? While someone who is blind, or who can't walk, have a more overt and visibly assessable disability, mental illness can certainly be extremely debilitating, affecting the person's ability to work, study, and just manage their daily lives.

At what point, and how, can people receive intervention to reduce the incidence of mental illness becoming a disability? And for those with a disability, how can help be better streamlined and provided?

The Australian National University's centre for mental health recently surveyed service providers[1] to reveal significant uncertainty in the sector. The study suggested the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was failing to achieve its core aims for people with a mental illness-related disability. High levels of distress and uncertainty were reported by service providers, and they were finding it difficult to keep good support staff due to poor pay. Essentially, service providers were competing against one another, rather than being encouraged to collaborate and support clients.

Lead ANU researcher and PhD candidate Maryanne Furst said providers had huge issues with mental health patient eligibility for services and they were concerned that hard to reach groups were being left behind. She said there had also been a reduction in the availability of services and programs, with 90 per cent of providers not funded beyond the next 12 months.

This ANU research echoes the report from Mental Health Community Coalition ACT in 2018[2] which highlighted the failures of the NDIS rollout for the sector. It found many ACT residents were worse off under the NDIS.

Meanwhile, at that local level, the ACT Government announced, in late 2018, a redesign of adult community mental health services. Minister for Mental Health, Shane Rattenbury, stated[3] he was seeking to deliver more 'streamlined, accessible and responsive services for Canberrans'.

What exactly streamlining means, and whether this is effective in terms of what it delivers to individuals, is yet to be seen.

It appears to be a shuffle around of services, a rebadge and rename for the existing Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CATT). It still has the same phone number, Canberrans can call Access Mental Health on 1800 629 354

The ACT Government announced a centralised intake, assessment and referral service which is planned to provide greater and quicker access to mental health services. A home treatment service is available to prevent unnecessary hospitalisation and to also help people to transition from hospital back into the community.

"We want to make it easier for Canberrans to seek help and advice," Minister Rattenbury said "Access Mental Health will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It provides a single point of contact across the ACT for advice, information on referrals, assessment and treatment, or mental health advice and information."

Children are not included as part of this initiative – an obvious gap which no-one has presented a solution for. It seems a logical step to offer intervention at the youngest levels with integration into the ACT education system. A greater focus on 'How to foster good mental health' and more services for parents to draw upon would reduce the presentations of mental illness as a disability in the next generation.
Where does this leave the ACT?

For those people who experience mental health issues on a daily basis, or those who might be sliding down the slippery slope of mental illness becoming a disability, and for children, there is a very real gap. And of course, navigating the minefield is an often confusing maze of where to get help.

What PWDACT doesn't want to see is more politicians cutting costs or services ('streamlining') and using clever language to hide this fact, or deny that the system is failing.

In its last webinar on mental health in 2015, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) stated that "(We) understand that recovery from mental health issues, including psychosocial disability, is possible for everyone and is a deeply personal, non-linear journey. A culture of listen, learn, build and deliver is central to the NDIA's approach to mental health."[4]

Therefore the NDIA should do exactly that. Listen, learn, build and deliver a better NDIS for people with mental health disabilities.

The mental health aspect to the NDIS needs urgent renewal and action, not merely review.

Government must take the lead, be clear, and work closely alongside researchers, service providers and clinicians for long-term policy and program solutions. As well as listening to the participants, and carers, who are being denied realistic care and support – in the case of many documented experiences, where specific medical advice has been arbitrarily struck down by the NDIA, usually by NDIS staff lacking any relevant medical experience.

Plain language.

No platitudes.

They need to simplify their funding structure to encourage collaboration among service providers.

More support for the workforce, and funding certainty to the sector is needed urgently.

The flow-on positive effects will only benefit people with disabilities.

[1] https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/ndis-has-created-distress-in-act-s-mental-health-sector-study-20190116-p50rqr.html
[2] https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/ndis-caused-massive-disruption-to-act-mental-health-sector-20180625-p4znma.html
[3] https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/rattenbury/2018/new-adult-community-mental-health-services-to-support-canberrans
[4] https://ndis.gov.au/html/sites/default/files/documents/NDIS-Mental-Health-Key-Themes.docx

Canberra Dance Club

by Rhiannon Arnold

Every Wednesday from 1:30pm to 3:00pm you will hear loud music pumping from the Belconnen Community Service Gym. If you were to peak through the doors you would see around 30 people moving to the music, in a Dance Club led by program officer Risa.
The Dance club is a dance class for adults living with mild to moderate disability.

Risa said "I have a loose dance structure; everyone can kind of do what they want".
The class usually starts with structured lessons and ends with a freestyle section, letting the participants move however they want and get a little wild.

Risa said the Dance club has really grown over the past six months. What had usually been a cohort of some 18 to 20 participants has climbed to an average of 30 people in the club.

"It's never been this big before, Risa said.

"We get a mix of participants, a lot of whom come to a lot of the other programs here, so there are already existing social networks."

The club doesn't focus on one particular style of dance. The group could work on Hip Hop, and move on to Bollywood, before switching to some partner dancing.

"I like to focus on a lot of different things, and get them to direct their own leaning as well," Risa said. "So, if they want to learn a dance or a movement from a different culture, or from a different decade, we will." But it's not all about learning how to shine on the dance floor.

"I like to try and bring in some conscious attitudes and ways of thinking about the body in a different way. It's not just movement, but also thinking about rhythm, and the relationship between music and movement".

And the act of dancing and learning to be expressive through the body has shown a leap in the confidence levels of the participants.

"For a lot of people getting into your body can be difficult, can be arduous, and can feel like a chore. But music and movement in the context of dance and self-expression can really inspire people".

Risa said a "human existence is a physical existence".

She said the things people learned through their bodies, and in the dance class often corresponded to other parts of their lives.

"Dance pulls in personality, pulls in sound from music, and movement in the body. Flexibility, strength and spirit and emotion – it really brings a lot of those things together".

When people joined the Dance Club, feeling a little shy or insecure Risa said they very quickly opened up after seeing the rest of the group. Watching the class be expressive and confident, has helped break down any hesitation newcomers might feel. That's what Risa said she loves about the Club.

"So many of them aren't inhibited in how they express themselves, which is really different. There are a lot of adults who really don't feel comfortable, they get insecure about looking funny, but a lot of the participants aren't like that. They're happy to give it a go and just get into it."

Risa said no-one should be nervous to join the club. She encouraged everyone to give it a go, and connect with other people and their own bodies.

"Your body is your tool. Everybody has their own body, everything you experience in your life is experienced through the body, and so you're giving yourself the time for your body to move, for your body to express itself, for your body to have a stretch, have a dance and communicate with other people, why not? It's the best thing you can do for yourself."

Attitude determines Altitude

Being in a wheelchair doesn't have to confine people. Indeed, people with disabilities can take to the skies. Did you know that many disabled persons are licensed pilots? Meet Brian Wilson, one of our very own Board Members of People with Disabilities ACT, who is a student pilot. As a child, Brian had polio and lost the ability to walk without assistance.

"I was just 18 months old when I contracted polio in Sydney in 1951, in the last Sydney epidemic before vaccinations were available. I was in Prince Henry Hospital for 6 months and then Canterbury hospital for 12 months. On leaving hospital I wore two long leg braces."

Brian's love of flying led him to take lessons and soar up to 8,000 feet.

"Believing I could never fly a plane as both legs are required to control a plane," Brian said. "That is until I was in my fifties when I found out about the charity organisation called 'Wheelies with Wings'.

"They use aircraft that have CASA approved hand controls so I applied and received a scholarship to learn to fly, which I did and this I thought was a highlight of my life! But then I received a scholarship to advance to flying solo which I did successfully and this was truly the high point of my life."

The first plane Brian flew was a Piper Cherokee (VH-ARC) via a scholarship from Wheelies with Wings. He had 20 hours flying with an instructor before flying solo for the first time.

The first time Brian flew a plane, he felt "total excitement and happiness."

"Accelerating down the runway and lifting-off into the sky is like nothing else. And up there, the manoeuvring like steep turns, diving and climbing and even stalling is all great fun."

Brian has found the hardest part of learning to fly is definitely landing. "Up in the air at speeds over 100 knots (185kph) you don't have the sensation of speed, but on landing at around 80 knots (150kph) as the ground gets closer and closer the sensation of speed really kicks in very fast! And judgement of the approach to meet the ground at the right location in the centre of the runway takes a lot of practice."

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The instructor with Wheelies with Wings, Sheldon Jones from Moruya Airport has, apart from his flying and communication skills, unending empathy and patience, according to Brian. Nothing is too much trouble for Sheldon with the range of ages and disabilities that he sees as students, he is a special man and pilot.

"I feel I have always liked flying, I joined the Australian Air League when about 10 years old and ventured right up through the ranks. On leaving school I started with Qantas as an apprentice Ground Engineer Instruments and remained with them for 10 years."

After working at Qantas, Brian was a Technical Officer with the NSW Government looking after all the scientific and research instrumentation.

"From that we moved to Canberra to work with the Australian Government in IT and spent the last 10 years before retirement in Contract Management of the outsourced IT services."

For Brian, the biggest encouragement and help for him with his disability was family and friends to start. Being a baby at onset, he didn't know any difference. "Like most polios, we just got on with it."

"In my late teens I met and married my wife, Jan, who has supported and helped me so much to have as close a normal life that I can, I am and always will be indebted to her."

Brian remains keen to fly - anytime and anywhere.

"I always feel excited with anticipation before the flight, but up there I feel free and that my disability doesn't matter to me or anyone else."

What would Brian like to see change for the better in Canberra for people with disabilities like himself?

"Access to everywhere for everyone."

Late last year, Brian spoke to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority for International Day of People with Disabilities about his early days relating to having had polio resulting in both legs being affected, and his love of all things flying and aircraft.

Andy's story - a gift of confidence

Adopted from overseas at eight months of age, Andy's parents knew instantly that his development was delayed. He couldn't hold up his own head or sit up on his own, and his hearing and vision were impaired. As a doctor, Andy's father, Wilson, was especially sensitive to these signs. As Andy grew, other symptoms arose such as speech impairment, low confidence and withdrawal due to him not being able to understand and follow instructions in a group environment with so much stimuli and distraction. Andy has Global Developmental Delay and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Andy is now 10 years old and has been riding at Pegasus for four years. At first, Andy was struggling. Physically, his coordination and fine motor skills were very poor. Andy needed help mounting the horse, and was assisted by two side walkers and a leader. But his most significant challenges were emotional, social and intellectual. His confidence was low and he continually tested any new-found relationships.

Andy's progress over his time at Pegasus has been astounding. Physically, Andy's development has soared and he is as strong as any other 10-year-old. He mounts by himself, has no side walkers and sometimes rides completely on his own. With time and patience, Andy's confidence has grown – he has become more at ease socially and his communication is improving every day. Wilson attributes much of Andy's increased confidence, communication, strength, balance and coordination to Pegasus.

"I've seen him advance in leaps and bounds with a lot of things socially," says Wilson. "When he first started he didn't have any friends... because of his behaviour, because of the way he was. Now, he's got so many friends and it's wonderful to see."

Pegasus are always delighted when they see the difference their programs make to children, teenagers and young adults every day. Physically, riding builds core muscle strength, improves balance and coordination. Mentally and socially, Pegasus' unique environment and the bond that develops between the rider and their horse helps to improve self-confidence and consequently, boosts communication, leadership and social skills. Pegasus' programs bring out these abilities in children living with disabilities, and enhance them.

In a world of change, Pegasus is Andy's constant. Same time each week, same horse, same leader and the same coach. "To have that stability for him is so important, with people he trusts." As with many children at Pegasus, Andy thrives in this consistent setting with a small group and direct, simple instructions.

This stable, predictable environment helps to increase confidence which can then hopefully be applied to situations outside of Pegasus. "Pegasus is providing him with a lot of confidence, and that's something he can apply to all areas of his life – now and as he gets older."

And as with many parents of children living with disabilities, Wilson worries how Andy will get on when he's older, but seeing him progress at Pegasus and witnessing his growing confidence gives him hope that Andy can one day lead a more independent life.

"I just want him to be happy. To see him progress, and to know he can make friends; he can learn new activities and tasks; and feel confident in his own abilities gives me a lot of assurance."

Andy loves coming to Pegasus. Seeing his big smile as he rides around the arena says it all – riding at Pegasus makes him happy. The bond between Andy and his pony, Bluey, his coach, Yolanda, and Pegasus volunteers, Kerry and Gayle, is evident. He has a second family at Pegasus. One he has grown with over the years and has come to love and respect. And the feeling is mutual!

Meet Molly - the girl who does it all

by Rhiannon Arnold

It's been five years since the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was rolled out, changing the way disability services are accessed in Australia.

The NDIS was launched in 2013, following calls for major reform in disability services across Australia with the ACT one of the first jurisdictions to agree to participate in the launch.
Now 6,553 people in the ACT access the NDIS and Belconnen Community Service (BCS) group programs have grown since the rollout, as demand has steadily climbed.

BCS Program Manager, Adam said, "before the NDIS organisations were restricted in what they could offer, as programs were capped, but now BCS has the opportunity to broaden its scope and offer more for our participants under the NDIS model."

The NDIS takes a lifetime approach, providing for Australians under the age of 65 with a permanent or significant disability.
Seventy six per cent of participants aged 25 years and over said the NDIS helped with their daily lives.
Molly started coming to BCS after our NDIS liaison coordinator, Masia, visited her home and encouraged her to try some social and recreational groups.

Molly has epilepsy and said she became a lot more confident about her disability after she accessed BCS and started to participate in several group programs.
"There's been a massive difference since I started coming here. I wasn't as confident before."
Every Friday Molly joins in sewing classes held at Belconnen Community Centre. She has an album on her phone filled with photos of all the beautiful creations she's made during those classes. From beanies and bags to soft toys for children, Molly's skills with the sewing machine are evident.
But it's not just sewing Molly takes part in. She goes to art classes, is part of the craft and dance clubs, she does martial arts every Monday, and is part of the Be Active group on Fridays.
Molly said, "these classes help me in a way I didn't think was possible. I was self-conscious of everything, but now I know it's stupid to be self-conscious of my disability and the way I walk."
Before she started coming to BCS regularly Molly said she didn't have many friends her own age, but on her first day at BCS Molly was introduced to Allyscha and they have been inseparable ever since.

Molly said, "the best part of my day is seeing Allyscha. My favourite day is Wednesday because I get to spend the whole day with her. She's teaching me Italian and I'm teaching her sign language."
She juggles all of her classes while working part time as a learning support assistant two days a week.
"I help the kids with reading and writing, listening to them and helping them to improve if they need to."
Molly said it's important to "be honest, nice kind and to listen to everyone", not just when teaching children but with everyone you meet.

Angela - Surprise Olympian from Belconnen

by Rhiannon Arnold

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is nearing its projected 2020 completion date after initially being tabled in Parliament in 2011.
The ACT was one of the first jurisdictions to agree to the launch, and now more than 6,000 people in the Territory access the NDIS.

Belconnen Community Service (BCS) (BCS) participant Angela said "I heard about BCS through my provider, before they got my plan going for the NDIS.
"The way the NDIS has changed my life is through my social skills, in talking with new people and gaining new friendships.

"With the NDIS you've got more choice and control... you can say 'no, I don't want these services'. You can individualise it."

Before accessing the NDIS, Angela relied on her High School services, but after graduating she and her family began investigating other options, and in just a few short years she has gone through an incredible transformation.

She first came to BCS to learn self-defence and build her social network.
This month, in what Angela said has been part of a very good year; she secured a job in administrative support at a Government department.

Angela said "I'm starting to gain more confidence in talking to new people.
"It's a safe environment where you can make social mistakes, and you won't be judged. That aspect has really helped me be more social at work, in talking to colleagues, because I've had the practice here."

But it's not just a new job that has Angela so happy. Only a few days after hearing the news about her new position, Angela found she had also been selected to represent Australia at the 2019 Special Olympics in Abu Dhabi. She will be playing Basketball.
Angela said she didn't think this is where she would be when she started to play.

"Mum was trying to get me into a social sport, and then my friend asked me if I'd ever thought of coming to play basketball."

Angela started playing through Basketball ACT in 2015, just as an Ivor Burge team, for people with an intellectual disability was created.
She will be heading to Newcastle in August where she will meet her Olympic team and learn how they all play together.

Angela said "it's been quite a year. The job is very supportive, they're happy for me to go to Abu Dhabi, which is really good considering I've just started."

Even though Angela has a medical condition which can make playing sport uncomfortable and even painful at times she said it didn't stop her.

"Through sports I don't really notice it; it just has its moments. I've got ankle braces for when I do sports, because I can be running and just fall. I know some disabilities can limit you but you shouldn't be afraid to use bracing or other things that make it easier to do the things you want."

BCS NDIS liaison coordinator Masia said "it will be sad to see Angela go after having her here for so long, but I am so proud of her, and she is doing so well. It's been great to watch Angela grow more confident, and walk a little taller and achieve everything she's wanted to."

2019 Calendar | key dates

People with Disabilities ACT

February
Thurs 21 – next PWDACT morning tea – to RSVP contact the office on (02) 6286 4223 | admin@pwdact.org.au

March
1 - International Wheelchair Day, WheelchairSteve
3 -- World Hearing Day, ACT Deafness Resource Centre.
8 March International Women's Day Women With Disabilities ACT

April
2 - World Autism Awareness Day Autism
11 - World Parkinson's Day, Parkinson's ACT
25 - International Guide Dog Day, Guide Dogs NSW ACT

May
1-31 - 65 Roses, Cystic Fibrosis Australia
29 - Wear White at Work for National White Wreath Day (Suicide awareness), White Wreath Association
30 - World MS Day, MS ACT
Next PWDACT Morning Tea - RSVP to the office on (02) 6286 4223 admin@pwdact.org.au

June
Thurs 6 June – PWDACT Forum - Disability & Health, ILC Health & Disability project
11-17 - Men's Health Week, Men's Health Information and Resource Centre
18-24 -- World Continence Week, Continence Foundation of Australia
21 - ALS/MND Global Day, Motor Neurone Disease ACT
Thurs 20, & 27 - PWDACT Self-Advocacy workshops - to RSVP contact the office on (02) 6286 4223 | admin@pwdact.org.au

July
4 - PWDACT Self-Advocacy workshops - to RSVP contact the office on (02) 6286 4223 | admin@pwdact.org.au

August
5-11 - International Assistance Dog Week, Assistance Dogs Australia
Thurs 22 - Next PWDACT morning tea - to RSVP contact the office on (02) 6286 4223 | admin@pwdact.org.au

September
1-30 - Dementia Awareness Month, Dementia Australia
1-30 - Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia
3-9 - National Stroke Week, Stroke Foundation
3-9 - Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Week, Australian Spinal Injury Alliance and ACT Spinal Cord Injury Association.
13 - R U OK? Day, R U OK?
23 - International Day of Sign Languages ACT Deafness Resource Centre.
28 September International Day for Access to Information

October
Thurs 10 – PWDACT Forum - to RSVP contact the office on (02) 6286 4223 | admin@pwdact.org.au
1-31 - Down Syndrome Awareness Month - Down Syndrome Australia
4-11 - National Amputee Awareness Week
6 - World Cerebral Palsy Day, Cerebral Palsy Alliance
10 - World Mental Health Day, ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
12 - World Sight Day, Vision 2020 Australia
15 October International White Cane Day Blind Citizens Australia.
20 - World Osteoporosis Day, International Osteoporosis Foundation
24 - World Polio Day, ACT Post-Polio Support Group

November
Wed 13 - PWDACT Committee Meeting
14 - World Diabetes Day - Diabetes NSW ACT
15 - World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Day - Lung Foundation Australia
Thurs 21 - Next PWDACT morning tea - to RSVP contact the office on (02) 6286 4223 | admin@pwdact.org.au

December
3 - International Day of People with Disability
10 International Human Rights Day
25 – 2 Jan - Office Shut-down Christmas/New Year

Note : some dates may be subject to change. Please check for more information with the office on admin@pwdact.org.au

You're invited to join PWDACT.

Membership is free for individuals with a disability.

Help build a stronger collective voice for people with disabilities in Canberra.

People with Disabilities ACT

To join, visit www.pwdact.org.au