



## **2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review**

**Submission to the regional Telecommunications Review Committee**

**Prepared by the Physical Disability Council of NSW**

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Physical Disability Council of NSW

St Helens Community Centre

3/184 Glebe Point Road

Glebe NSW 2037

Ben Williams

Freecall: 1800 688 831

Phone: 02 9552 1606

Web: [www.pdcnsw.org.au](http://www.pdcnsw.org.au)



## **About the Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN)**

The Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN) is the peak body representing people with physical disability across New South Wales. Physical disability is part of the lives of approximately 937,000 residents, from young children and their representatives to aged people. They live across the state, from the Greater Sydney Metropolitan area to regional, rural and remote NSW and they are from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances.

### **Introduction**

PDCN appreciates the opportunity in providing feedback as part of the *2011-12 regional Telecommunications review*. Its comments are focused on four basic issues

- The need for infrastructure development
- The impact that such infrastructure could have on the community
- Strategies to help disadvantaged groups have greater access to Information Communication Technologies ICT's
- The information privacy issues that arise from a reliance on internet.

PDCN stresses that these issues are just as pertinent to rural and remote communities as regional communities and encourages the department to use this review to find solutions to empower rural, regional and remote communities to engage more fully with the digital economy. This will create inclusive communities which empower people with a disability to live ordinary lives.

### ***Question 2. What is needed to extend and accelerate the role of telecommunications services and ICT in delivering benefits to regional economies?***

PDCN views the role of telecommunication services and ICTs as vital to boosting regional economies and creating more inclusive communities regardless of where they are located (metropolitan, regional, rural and remote ). Such a community will have, for each individual, personal choice and control, improved access to supports and new possibilities for employment, achievement and independence. This will require significant advances in reliability, coverage, education and training.

Reliability is of particular importance in many regional areas as it can have a significant impact on choices available to consumers. As an example the nature

of some regional communities can mean that they are restricted by geography to what type of internet service is the most reliable. This can place restrictions on business opportunities and initiatives. For example, it would be unwise for a business that requires low latency internet speeds such as internet cafes, data and other co-location services such as data centres etc to open in an area where satellite was the only reliable option.

Coverage relates to the ability for ICT's to send and receive data between each other ,or a hard line service, in a geographical region. This is important in regional communities with many unable to utilise certain ICTs because of lack of coverage in their area. In some regional areas home mobile phones are unable to be used because they have no reception. As such, individuals are required to use a satellite phones instead, which is a more expensive option. PDCN understands that the issues effecting coverage is not just infrastructure. The geography of the region and the current limits of technology can also play a large role in the lack of coverage in some areas. However, it is clear that for Telecommunication services and ICT to benefit region economies more must be able to access them

In considering how telecommunication services can deliver benefits to regional economies it is important for there to be a concerted effort to educate members of regional communities on the value and uses of ICT's and the positive impact it could have on the regional economy. Access to a quality services including education is an issue of equality for all citizens not just those who live in densely populated areas.

***Question 7. Do you have ideas for ways in which high-speed broadband could enhance the delivery of education and healthcare outcomes in regional communities?***

In considering the role that internet can play in education and Healthcare. The introduction of high-speed broadband could significantly enhance this services in a variety of ways. These could include: allowing great access to educational resource; and making distance for teachers and student much more practical

These enhancements rely on high-speed broadband being reliable, cost effective and secure to ensure it has the highest impact. It is for this reason that PDCN proposes that certain subsidies be made available to individuals in regional communities engaging in distance learning. This will have a significant impact on primary and secondary students giving them digital literacy skills that help engage in the digital economy. Tertiary

students could also gain a great deal from distance education with particular courses offered at a subsidy based to encourage needed skill development in communities. This subsidy could be identified under the commonwealth supported places program.

The introduction of high-speed broadband could be beneficial to health services allowing for the possibility of distance consultations training courses for doctors and nurses as part of their accreditation. In addition, it could also allow health care professionals greater access to supervision and specialist advice and guidance. PDCN cautions that despite its possible benefits there is a danger that the advent of long distance consults could be seen as negating the need for more doctors in regional communities. This should not be the case. Indeed, if properly monitored, the use of long distance consultation could help highlight the need for specialist practitioners in a community.

***Question 12: What more could be done to improve digital literacy amongst Indigenous Australians and within Indigenous communities?***

PDCN believes that efforts should be made to provide greater support and training given to children in indigenous communities. Programs to enhance digital literacy are important across all age group. In considering this issue PDCN uses the Benefits realisation model. This model contends that engagement with the ICT's is based off 4 principles:

**Context:** This refers to how people live their lives at home work and in the community in this area, ICT use is related to if it adds value to the individuals life

**Content:** refers to what people used the ICTs to access Even if users have access to a digital technology, they are unlikely to continue using the technology if it does not deliver content that they want, when, where and how they want it.

**Connectivity:** refers to the way in which people access the internet and the mediums they use to do it. As an example a PC might be the best way to access the internet but should an individual require mobility then their mobile phone would be best.

**Capability** refers to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the user. The quality of support and reinforcement provided by others influences take-up and use of ICT's and the development of digital literacy.

If this model is considered it is clear that it is not simply one thing but a variety of things that could improve digital literacy for indigenous communities this includes:

- Information sessions of the applications of ICT's and how they can add value to peoples lives'. This could involve working with elders to illustrate to them the value of the internet and its applications in documenting the cultural history of the community its language and practices.
- The elders would then become early adopters and champions of technology.
- Offer computer workshops and information sessions to as many people as possible

***Question 17. Do people in regional areas, particularly those in vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, have appropriate access to information about their consumer rights and the service options available to them?***

PDCN believes that consumers from disadvantaged groups are not provided with enough information on their consumer rights nor with advice and guidance on making complaints to the relevant authorities. This is highlighted in an ACCAN study on barriers to telecommunication in regional areas where it states that “half of the organisations interviewed were aware of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman but those who were aware, were of the opinion that dealing with this body would be too difficult and onerous for their clients. This was put down to the inability of disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers to prioritise making a complaint about a telecommunications provider due to other concerns they face.

PDCN believes that to rectify this problem two strategies can be put into place

1. Increase the amount of information available on consumer rights through a variety of different sources and mediums. This can involve providing greater information to community groups and local not for profits in addition to providing information to the community through the local paper and radio
2. Develop education packages for not for profit sector based on consumer rights and responsibilities using the empowerment model

***Question 19: Are there specific cyber safety challenges that arise from the way that communications technologies are being used by regional, rural or remote communities?***

PDCN does not believe that they are cyber safety challenges specific to a regional setting. However, the nature of regional communities means that the consequences of

cyber safety issues are exacerbated. A clear example of this is privacy of information, many regional communities are close and so privacy is a very important issue. This is particularly true long distance medical consultation here an individual could be giving sensitive personal information over the internet the content of which, if made public in the community could have significant impact economically socially and mentally