

## **Productivity Commission —Inquiry into the Disability Discrimination Act 1992**

**Alice Springs visits, 24–26 June 2003** (*Cate McKenzie, Patrick Laplagne, Jo Lawson*)

*This note was prepared by Productivity Commission staff who participated in the visit detailed below, and checked by Commissioner Anderson for accuracy. This note summarises the tenor of the discussions held at the time and does not represent the views of the Productivity Commission.*

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission — 25 June, 3.00pm–4.00pm** (*Alison Anderson, ATSIC Commissioner & Rhonda Loed*)

There is discrimination against Aboriginal people through lack of services eg. people with hearing disabilities who attend court don't have signing services available. Blind people do not have access to accessible homes and shopping services.

A rate of deafness of 4 per cent is considered a crisis in the rest of Australia. Yet, 70 per cent of children in some remote communities are hearing impaired.

Vision impairment problems are severe, too, due to glaucoma. This can cause problems for people trying to use services Centrelink, ATMs, etc.

Some people have not left their community, so they don't get any services except 6 months free power occasionally.

There is a service called Patient Assistance Transport Scheme (PATS) for people in wheelchairs to travel to doctors' appointments. However, it is only available if they are more than 150 kms from Alice Springs.

ATSIC and Central Land Council have adopted and promoted an accessible housing design suitable for Indigenous people.

People with disabilities are often taken into custody by police who think they are drunk. This happens all the time.

No suitable adjustments are provided for disabled students: case of a student with only one leg having to climb stairs. Similarly, there are no accessibility provisions in shops.

There is a culture of non-complaint amongst Aborigines, including in regard to racial discrimination. This is partly because of lack of awareness of rights,

partly because of historical reasons. Also, they can be victimised if they complain, by the only service provider in town.

Normal phones are not provided by Telstra, let alone TTY. Negotiations to improve matters have so far been unsuccessful. Some people have had to walk to the hospital because of lack of telephone access. In some cases Telstra wants to charge \$25,000 to connect a house to the phone!

Indigenous families adjust to disabilities. For example, they develop their own sign language.

Hygiene problems arise from the fact that some communities do not have access to basic utilities such as water. When there is water, it is often contaminated by naturally-occurring uranium!

Substance abuse is a problem. A petrol sniffer with massive disabilities wasn't encouraged back into his community, but Commissioner Anderson ensured he went back to the community as a way for the community to understand the consequences of substance abuse. He was supported by a community education and liaison officer.

People with disabilities are needed, to serve as role models for school children.

The HREOC complaints process is too long and not culturally adapted. People will just walk away.

Government needs to be aware of the fact that the town clerks it appoints often are not doing a good job. If the community complains, the clerk is just moved to another location (in order to avoid claims of unfair dismissal against the Government).

States and Territories should be made responsible for service delivery.

It is important to develop links between Government and disability organisations. Users of the services should be involved in both the design and provision of health and care services.