



## **The right of persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making**

Reply to the Questionnaire of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

Advocacy for Inclusion

September 2015

**About Advocacy for Inclusion  
Home of the Disability Rights Law Centre**

Advocacy for Inclusion acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners of the land on which we work.

Advocacy for Inclusion provides individual, self and systemic advocacy services for people with disabilities. We provide information, education, and representation to effectively advocate for positive and inclusive outcomes for people with disabilities.

We act with and on behalf of individuals in a supportive manner, or assist individuals to act on their own behalf, to obtain a fair and just outcome for the individual concerned.

Advocacy for Inclusion works within a human rights framework and acknowledges the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, and is signed onto the *ACT Human Rights Act*.

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We agree to this submission being posted on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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## 1. Legislative and policy framework for representative organisations

Disability organisations are recognised in the *National Disability Strategy* as “essential in promoting the rights of people with disability”.<sup>1</sup> Despite the UN Committee recommending that Australia “take initiatives to increase the resources available for independent organisations of persons with disabilities”<sup>2</sup> the scarce amount of funding allocated for representative organisations has been substantially reduced by the Federal Australian government.<sup>3</sup> It should also be noted that the levels of government support received by service provider and carer groups far outweigh the levels of support provided to disabled people’s and advocacy organisations.

In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), representative organisations, including cross-disability organisations People with Disabilities ACT (PWDACT) and Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT), perform valuable work with very limited funding. Advocacy for Inclusion undertakes a significant role in advocating for and representing the voices of people with cognitive disabilities and significant communication barriers. Although we have not formally declared ourselves as a DPO, we are able to do so. Additionally, Ethnic Disability ACT (EDACT) endeavours to participate but is not funded. These four organisations often work collaboratively to ensure the broadest possible voice of disability is heard.

Advocacy for Inclusion is keenly aware of the role of individual, self and systemic advocacy activities in amplifying the voices of marginalised people with disabilities. Our consumers are generally not members of representative organisations or likely to get actively involved in their activities or seek opportunities to contribute their views. Improving the framework for representative organisations must be accompanied by resourcing for self-advocacy and leadership training for people with disabilities to ensure that all voices and perspectives can influence decision making processes. The Self-advocacy Program run by Advocacy for Inclusion is the only leadership development program for the most marginalised and isolated people with disabilities currently operating in the ACT and one of only a few operating in Australia.

## 2. Legislation and policies aimed at ensuring persons with disabilities and their representative organisations are consulted and involved in decision-making processes

The first principle of the *National Disability Strategy* is the “involvement of people with disability”:

*the views of people with disability are central to the design, funding, delivery and evaluation of policies, programs and services which impact on them, with appropriate support and adjustment for participation.*<sup>4</sup>

In terms of roles and responsibilities, people with disabilities “must play a central role in shaping and implementing policies, programs and services that affect them.”<sup>5</sup> All Australian governments “have a responsibility to ensure inclusion, accessibility and connection across levels of government in all matters affecting the interests of people with disability”<sup>6</sup>

Despite these broad policy commitments, there are not, (as the UN Committee observed in 2013):

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<sup>1</sup> 2010-2020 *National Disability Strategy* at p24.

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability, ‘Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Australia, Adopted by the Committee at Its Tenth Session (2–13 September 2013)’ (United Nations, 4 October 2013). 13.

<sup>3</sup> May, J. (2015, February 13) Disability sector funding cuts attacked by former UN committee chairman. *The Sydney Morning Herald* <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/disability-sector-funding-cuts-attacked-by-former-un-committee-chairman-20150211-13c51o.html>

<sup>4</sup> 2010-2020 *National Disability Strategy* at p23.

<sup>5</sup> 2010-2020 *National Disability Strategy* at p24.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

*“enough mechanisms for consultation and engagement between Government and persons with disabilities and their organisations in all matters of policy development and legislative reform relating to the Convention”.*<sup>7</sup>

This inadequacy was reflected in the 2014 engagement of Disability Advocacy Network Australia, which surveyed people on progress being made in the six outcomes areas of the *National Disability Strategy*. Resoundingly across all areas, survey respondents did not believe that there exist “effective mechanisms for people with disabilities and their supporters to provide their input and influence government (or other stakeholders)”. Responses underlined perceptions of insufficiency, ineffectiveness or inaccessibility for certain groups:

*“There are a few effective mechanisms - just not enough”;*

*“There might be mechanisms but they are not effective.”*

*“Particularly not for people with cognitive impairments.”*

Australian governments, including the ACT Government, are yet to meaningfully embrace the concept of people with disabilities being experts in their own matters. People with disabilities are often not invited to participate in processes of legislative reform and policy development and their voices are missing from crucial conversations. Further, when consultation does occur insufficient weight is given to the input, and may fail to genuinely engage with what is said, becoming merely tokenistic or constrained in its potential influence on outcomes:

*“Even when an opportunity may be provided, the government or other stakeholders have already decided the bottom line and input is shaped within this - usually how much does it cost and certainly without understanding the impact on the vulnerable person's lived experience.”*<sup>8</sup>

There has also been a failure to incorporate the perspectives of people with disabilities through their appointment within government and in other leadership positions. This is the case for both national and local government.

### ***The local level – Australian Capital Territory***

The ACT Government has professed commitment “to engaging effectively with its citizens in a meaningful, accountable, responsive and equitable way.”<sup>9</sup> Despite some positive initiatives and efforts,<sup>10</sup> the involvement and consultation of people with disabilities in both disability-specific and mainstream decision making has been mostly cursory, tokenistic or otherwise inadequate. For people with disabilities living in the ACT, there is limited access to community consultation processes, leadership and representative roles, and paid public service positions.

For instance, the recently disbanded ACT NDIS Expert Panel, focussing on the biggest disability reform in a life time, comprised only one quarter people with disabilities, and only one woman with disability.<sup>11</sup> An Expert

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<sup>7</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability, ‘Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Australia, Adopted by the Committee at Its Tenth Session (2–13 September 2013)’ (United Nations, 4 October 2013). 10.

<sup>8</sup> Disability Advocacy Network Australia (2014) *“A long way to go”: Progress on the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020* pp11-12.

<sup>9</sup> ACT Government (2011) *Engaging Canberrans: A guide to community engagement*. 3.

<sup>10</sup> The five year policy framework for the ACT Government, *Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014*

[http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability\\_act/future-directions-towards-challenge-2014](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability_act/future-directions-towards-challenge-2014). The recently launched *Involve* initiative of the ACT Inclusion Council, (2015) *Involve – Canberra Disability Commitment*. <http://www.involvecbr.com.au/>

<sup>11</sup> Community Services Directorate, ACT Government (2015) *ACT Disability Expert Panel Membership*; [http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability\\_act/disability-expert-panel](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability_act/disability-expert-panel)

Panel established in April 2015 to review policy and practice for supporting and teaching students with complex needs and challenging behaviour in ACT schools has no people with disabilities appointed to it. The Panel comprises three noted education and children's rights experts, but no person with disability rights expertise and no person with disability. This absence was raised by Advocacy for Inclusion with the relevant Minister at the time of the appointments; however, she rejected the need for people, or children, with disabilities to be engaged in discussions about their own rights.

In Advocacy for Inclusion's most recent submission to the ACT Budget Consultation 2015-16 we urged the ACT Government to involve people with disabilities as co-designers responding to the issues that concern them.<sup>12</sup> We recommended a whole of ACT government strategy that commits government agencies to meaningfully engage and support people with disabilities in consultations and as equal partners in leadership and representative roles, and in paid positions in the public service. This is not the first time we have recommended this and there are yet to be any concrete responses to our recommendations.<sup>13</sup> Specifically we have recommended:

- introducing data collection processes on the disability status of people participating in consultations and government reference or advisory groups to monitor disability representation.
- establishing a system for continuously seeking advice from people with disabilities who are well regarded and well connected to the disability community, and who are representatives from disabled peoples and disability advocacy organisations.
- implementing of measures to increase employment of people with disabilities within the ACT public service.
- re-designing consultation processes to be more inclusive and accessible.
- establishing a policy committing government agencies to meaningfully engage and support people with disabilities in representative and leadership roles.
- funding grass roots, flexible leadership development, including self-advocacy and consumer representation training, targeted at people with disabilities.

Disability policy development, analysis, and advice to government should be done to the greatest extent possible by people with disabilities. However, they are scarcely employed in relevant positions or in directly delivering government services to the community. Since 1993, the numbers of Australians with disabilities employed by the public sector has been dropping; from 5.8% in 1993 to 3.8% in 2003-04,<sup>14</sup> and even lower to 3.1% during 2010 to 2014.<sup>15</sup> In comparison with other countries, Australia is ranked 21 out of 29 OECD countries in employment rates for people with disabilities.<sup>16</sup> The ACT Government is performing particularly poorly with people with disabilities only comprising 2 per cent of ACT public service employees.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Recommendations 9-14 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2014) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2015-16*, p14-16.

<sup>13</sup> We have advocated similar measures in previous Budget Submissions: Recommendations 3-6 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2010) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2011-12*; Recommendations 1, 5-7, 18, 21 and 22 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2012) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2012-13*; Recommendations 1, 4, 5 and 11-16 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2013) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2013-14*; Recommendations 1 and 8-12 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2013) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2014-15*.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. (2006). *National Inquiry into Employment and Disability*.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Public Service Commissioner, *State of the Service Report 2013-2014* Appendix 5 – Diversity. At [www.apsc.gov.au/about-the-apsc/parliamentary/state-of-the-service/state-of-the-service-2013-14/appendices/diversity](http://www.apsc.gov.au/about-the-apsc/parliamentary/state-of-the-service/state-of-the-service-2013-14/appendices/diversity) (viewed 22 May 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2010). *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers - A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries*.

<sup>17</sup> ACT Government. (2014) *ACT Public Service – State of the Service Report*. p44.

This means it is highly unlikely that disability policy will be developed by people with disabilities within the public sector. Additionally, it means that it is highly unlikely that a person with disability engaging with the public sector will be speaking to a person with disability.

Sometimes government will engage representative or advocacy organisations or individuals with disabilities to contribute unpaid expertise to make up the shortfall in disability expertise within government and public sector ranks. Very occasionally these individuals or organisations will be paid for this work. A few small non-government organisations with very limited funding (see above) are expected to provide expert advice across a wide range of disability related areas on an ad hoc basis to meet the government's agenda which may not align to their own priorities. This is a serious limitation to the government developing good policy and programs about disability matters. It also sends a message that disability related matters are unimportant, and that what people with disabilities have to say is less valuable.

### **3. Bodies and mechanisms for consulting and engaging with representative organisations?**

#### ***The local level – Australian Capital Territory***

Advocacy for Inclusion has repeatedly identified a lack of mechanisms through which people with disabilities can effectively participate and be represented in the decision making of the ACT government. Some advisory groups have been established that include people with disabilities, yet they have often lacked sufficient transparency and accountability in their operations. Government processes appointing members to committees or panels have consistently failed to engage with representative organisations or community groups to ensure the membership is able to genuinely and accurately represent people with disabilities in the ACT in their diversity.

For instance, the recently disbanded NDIS Expert Panel has been rebranded as the Disability Expert Panel<sup>18</sup> without any consultation with the disability community, and without any transparent or accountable appointment process. Very few people with disabilities know that it exists, and even fewer know who its members are.

The Expert Panel appears to have replaced the Disability Advisory Council which was in place for over 15 years and advised the ACT government on a range of matters relevant to both its members and to the government across all areas of policy.

The new mechanism is quite opaque and provides no real capacity for people with disabilities in the community to contribute to its agenda or responsibilities, nor what it hopes to achieve over a given period. While many members are well regarded persons with disabilities, they have not been appointed as representatives of any particular civil society organisations and do not report back to the community they are purported to represent. People with disabilities must be represented by people who are respected by the disability community, and who are in touch with current issues and priorities across the population of people with disabilities. Most importantly, they should be representatives of disabled peoples' and disability advocacy organisations.

Previously, Advocacy for Inclusion has also expressed concern that the ACT Government does not cast a disability lens across all areas of social policy. While there is an agency within government called Disability ACT, it has focussed almost entirely on policies regarding disability service provision and NDIS preparations, rather than its original envisaged role to act as the central policy coordination unit across the whole of government. This has resulted in major disability gaps in government policy and ad hoc responses.

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<sup>18</sup> Community Services Directorate, ACT Government (2015) *ACT Disability Expert Panel Membership*  
[http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability\\_act/disability-expert-panel](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/disability_act/disability-expert-panel)

Disability advocacy organisations (including Advocacy for Inclusion) put considerable resources into identifying policy gaps and advocating for government to retrofit inadequate and inappropriate policy responses across a broad range of areas.<sup>19</sup> This could be effectively prevented if policy were developed through a disability lens in the first place and informed and tested through mechanisms to involve and consult with disabled people's and advocacy organisations at an early stage of policy development.

#### **4. Efforts to strengthen capacity of representative organisations in order to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes**

Disabled people's and advocacy organisations actively participate in and seek out opportunities to influence Federal, State and local legislative and policy decision-making that affects people with disabilities. Despite considerable efforts to do so in ways that are effective and comprehensive of mainstream and disability-specific decision-making, the capacity of these organisations is severely constrained by very limited resourcing. Organisations are stretched in their attempts to respond to numerous inquiries, reviews and other reform or oversight processes. Genuine consultation with representative and advocacy organisations is not uniform, and is often not supported with the timely availability of alternative formats consultation documents, or mechanisms which better support the involvement of all people with disabilities. The inclusion of the voice of people with disabilities in all matters affecting them remains ad hoc in the ACT and nationally.

#### **5. Participation of persons with disabilities in monitoring the implementation of the UN CRPD**

Advocacy for Inclusion contributed information to and endorsed the 2012 *Civil Society Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.<sup>20</sup> The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Australia:

*in partnership with persons with disabilities through their representative organisations, including children with disabilities, establish engagement mechanisms for ensuring meaningful participation in the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the Convention.*<sup>21</sup>

The *National Disability Strategy* commits governments to ensuring that people with disabilities remain actively engaged during the implementation of the *Strategy* and that their views are reflected in the two-yearly progress reports to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). However, the 2014 process failed to adequately involve people with disabilities in evaluating progress made, or to equip representative and advocacy organisations with the resources necessary to engage and consult widely to inform the second report. Furthermore it is unclear in what form the information collected in 2014 by national disability organisations and provided to the Department of Social Services has been conveyed to the Council of Australian Governments as no summary report has yet been made available.

#### ***The local level – Australian Capital Territory***

Notably, the ACT Inclusion Council has recently launched an initiative called *Involve: Canberra Disability Commitment*, which aims to build the movement toward practical implementation of the CRPD and the *National Disability Strategy*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Recent examples of retrofitting include the *ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2011-2017* and the proposed *Out of Home Care Strategy*. People with disabilities are heavily over represented in statistics as victims of violence, and they are also substantially over represented in interventions by Child Protection Services. However, both of these policies in their original form lacked adequate acknowledgement and response of their impact on people with disabilities.

<sup>20</sup> Disability Representative, Advocacy, Legal and Human Rights Organisations. (2012). *Disability rights now: Civil Society report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

<sup>21</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (4 October 2013). *Concluding observations on the initial report of Australia, adopted by the Committee at its tenth session (2–13 September 2013)* (Para. 11).

<sup>22</sup> ACT Inclusion Council, (2015) *Involve – Canberra Disability Commitment*. <http://www.involvecbr.com.au/>

## 6. Challenges in participating in mainstream and disability-specific decision-making processes

People with disabilities, especially those with cognitive and communication impairments, are almost totally excluded from leadership and representative roles. The barriers to participation are significant and are often compounded by intersectional discrimination. Disability leaders must be diverse in order to truly represent people with disabilities; however, this is not currently the case. Existing ACT policies commit governments to ensure gender equality on government boards and reference groups.<sup>23</sup> Advocacy for Inclusion has recommended that this model also be applied to the engagement of people with disabilities, to ensure that men and women with disabilities are engaged equally at the representative and leadership level.<sup>24</sup> In our engagement for *Caravan Report: Perspectives of Women with Disabilities - NGO Review 2014 for Beijing + 20* we found women with disabilities in the ACT had experienced difficulty taking part in decisions affecting the community, including when participating in reference groups. Women with disabilities expressed having felt intimidated because they are often the only person with disability participating and they are also outnumbered by men who tend to dominate the process.

Independent advocacy, including self-advocacy training, is crucial to ensuring all people with disabilities can actively contribute to and participate in decision making processes. The ACT Government only provides a small amount of ongoing funding for self-advocacy and a further allocation for systemic advocacy for people with disabilities. The ACT is one of only two Australian jurisdictions that does not fund individual advocacy. As a result independent advocacy in the ACT is under-resourced and unable to respond to demand.

Consultation processes do not generally involve concerted efforts by government to engage people with disabilities, particularly those who are most isolated and unengaged.<sup>25</sup> For example, people with disabilities living in institutional or residential care. Many of these people have high support and access needs, and are inexperienced in participating in community consultations due to access barriers. Many are unable to participate in submitting a written contribution due to communication or literacy barriers, and find consultation forums intimidating and unwelcoming, and not suited to their disability access needs. However, these are the people who are most directly and significantly impacted by government policies and funding decisions. Advocacy for Inclusion advocates with and on behalf of these people to help them be heard by government, however, advocacy in the ACT, and nationally, is grossly underfunded which directly prevents meaningful consultation with this highly marginalised group.

When people with disabilities have been involved in decision-making or advisory processes appropriate accommodations or supports have often been absent. For instance, a person with intellectual disability included in a government advisory group has not been able to contribute their knowledge and insights to a policy process because no time or support or accessible formats were provided to assist the person to understand the issues and meaningfully participate in discussions.

## 7. Organisations of persons with disabilities

The overall funding allocated to representative organisations was reduced by the Federal Government in 2014. Furthermore, there are significant barriers that prevent the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups, who often face multiple discrimination, from engaging effectively. Despite the efforts and inclusive ethos and structure of disabled peoples' organisations, many people with disabilities cannot engage with or actively participate in the activities of representative organisations, without significant support and training in self-

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<sup>23</sup>ACT Women's Plan 2010-2015. (p. 11)

[http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/122506/ACT\\_Womens\\_Plan\\_2010\\_-15.pdf](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/122506/ACT_Womens_Plan_2010_-15.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Recommendation 10 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2014) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2015-16*, Recommendation 11 in Advocacy for Inclusion (2013) *Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2014-15*;

<sup>25</sup> The term "unengaged" is used to apply to people who have never had an opportunity to be engaged, as opposed to "disengaged" which implies a former level of engagement that no longer exists.

advocacy, consumer representation and leadership skills. Advocacy organisations endeavour to amplify the voices of the most marginalised and isolated people with disabilities and support the full diversity of people with disabilities to have their voices heard, yet they do not have resources to do this with small groups of people, or to assist with transport or support staff appropriate to the needs of the most marginalised people, but are expected to provide strong engagement with similar resources to other groups in the community who do not experience similar barriers. The funding that is currently available for independent advocacy is under serious uncertainty as national and state governments dither over how to fund advocacy in the context of the NDIS. The National Disability Advocacy Program is an ongoing program funded through the Department of Social Services. NDAP funds 59 organisations to provide a range of 6 different types of disability advocacy throughout Australia.<sup>26</sup> This program is only funded to June 2016 with no mechanism yet identified to continue independent advocacy after that time.<sup>27</sup> The very small and under resourced advocacy sector is yet to have confirmation that its work will continue beyond the middle of 2016.

## **8. Challenges in participating in the activities of mainstream and disability-specific non-governmental organisations**

Due to their marginal position in society, many potential ACT disability leaders are kept far away from leadership roles. Negative attitudes mean that they are often not trusted to make decisions about their own lives, let alone decisions that affect the community more broadly. Over the years Advocacy for Inclusion has observed and documented that many of our consumers have little or no involvement in making day to day decisions about themselves, and have minimal opportunities to engage in the community.<sup>28</sup> Even with some level of community engagement, many others have no experience and limited skills in either self-advocacy or consumer representation. Without any education and training in self-determination and self-advocacy skills, the various community activities of both mainstream and disability-specific NGOs will remain inaccessible to this group.

Through our Self-advocacy Program Advocacy for Inclusion has seen people with disabilities begin to realise their own leadership potential. Self-advocacy training can act as the catalyst and essential preparation stage for leadership development. People with disabilities often miss the basic self-advocacy path that the broader community experiences as they grow up. Learning these skills later is both challenging and rewarding, but it also requires ongoing reinforcement so that people who are using a newly learned skill are able to develop it into an inherent skill. Basic individual self-advocacy training, followed by participation in a self-advocacy course, is only the beginning of a long journey. Some graduates of self-advocacy training will become candidates for consumer representation training and opportunities. Some consumer representatives will also move on to governance and leadership positions.

However, there is a lack of leadership programs targeted to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Highly successful leadership development programs exist for Indigenous people and for women. There are no comparable ongoing programs for people with disabilities and no current concerted effort to build capacity. Mainstream leadership programs can appear intimidating and unwelcoming. They are typically targeted at people who are verbally articulate, confident in large groups, and suited to the classroom learning format. Usually they are delivered over a short timeframe. Conversely, many people with disabilities use alternative communication formats, feel more comfortable in small or one to one sessions, and are best suited to practical learning formats such as mentoring. In particular, many require ongoing support in their leadership roles, especially those with cognitive impairments. Leadership programs must be tailored and flexible to suit these

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<sup>26</sup> Department of Social Services (2015) *National Disability Advocacy Programme (NDAP)*. <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/for-people-with-disability/national-disability-advocacy-program-ndap>

<sup>27</sup> Advocacy for Inclusion (2015) *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into community sector funding*. <http://advocacyforinclusion.org/index.php/2014-09-22-05-11-32/publications-home/funding>

<sup>28</sup> Advocacy for Inclusion (2013). *"Ask me. I make my own decisions": Report on the findings of a study into the experience of control and choice of people with disabilities in the ACT*. <http://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/index.php/publications-home/decision-making>

diverse needs and must also respond to particular challenges faced by people with disabilities who experience multiple discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

Advocacy for Inclusion has consistently raised concerns, and made recommendations, about the lack of representation by people with disabilities at both the local and national level. Additionally, we have provided governments with expertise on how to improve their engagement and involvement of people with disabilities at all levels including leadership.

The need for governments to commit to leadership and decision making by people with disabilities remains, and the commitment of resources is long overdue. Until this commitment is made disabled people's representative and advocacy organisations will continue to be called upon to retrofit and adjust policies and program development with their scarce resources. While some improvements have been made, they exist due to ad hoc processes. There is no current systemic commitment to ensure consistent and meaningful engagement and representation in line with the expectations of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

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<sup>29</sup> Some Australian examples include the Enabling Women Leadership program at Women with Disabilities Victoria <http://www.wdv.org.au/> and Community Voices at Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association in NSW <http://www.mdaa.org.au/projects/community-voices>.