Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Meeting Minutes

Communications Accessibility Consultative Committee – meeting #6

Date: 23/09/2026 **Time**: 10:00 – 11:30

Location: Virtual

Chair: Sam Grunhard, First Assistant Secretary, Consumer Safeguards, Media and Connectivity Division

Attendees

Name	Organisation/position
Sam Grunhard	First Assistant Secretary, Consumer Safeguards, Media and Connectivity Division, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (DITRDCSA)
Kate McMullan	Assistant Secretary, Consumer Safeguards and Regulator Governance Branch, DITRDCSA
Alan Chalmers	Director, Communications Accessibility, DITRDCSA
Roberta Sousa	A/g Assistant Director, Communications Accessibility, DITRDCSA
Stephen Smith	Senior Policy Officer, Communications Accessibility, DITRDCSA
Ben McAtamney	National Policy and Advocacy Officer, Deaf Blind Australia
Rebecca Adam	CEO, Expression Australia
Penelope Purcell	Expression Australia
Jonathon Craig	Policy and Advocacy Manager, Vision 2020 Australia
Bronwyn Morrish	Assistant Secretary, Australia's Disability Strategy Branch, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA)
Hayley Stone	National Director, Policy and Advocacy, Deafness Forum Australia
Lincoln Blake	Director A/NZ Account Manager, Concentrix
Philip Waters	Deaf Australia

Name	Organisation/position
Katrina Lancaster	Deaf Connect
Rebekah Palmer	ACCAN
Francois Jacobs	Blind Citizens Australia

Apologies:

Name	Organisation/position
Brent Phillips	Chief Services Officer, Deaf Connect
Brett Casey	CEO, Deaf Connect
Amelia Radke	Senior Policy Adviser, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
Shirley Liu	CEO, Deaf Australia
Anita Herbert	Communications and Media Manager, Inclusion Australia

Minutes

Agenda item 1: Welcome

Sam Grunhard opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

Agenda item 2: Audio description presentation

Presenter: Francois Jacobs, Blind Citizens Australia.

Francois Jacobs presented on the importance of audio description and captioning as essential accessibility measures for people who are blind, vision impaired, deaf or hard of hearing. He outlined the history of audio description in Australia, recent policy developments, and the case for legislative reform to improve accessibility across television services.

Key points included:

- **Audio Description and Captioning:** Francois outlined the distinct roles of captioning and audio description in providing equitable access to media content for people with disability.
- **Progress and Remaining Gaps:** While audio description services have expanded through the ABC and SBS, Francois noted that access remains unavailable on commercial television.
- **Drivers for Reform:** Francois highlighted technological advancements, human rights obligations, disability legislation, community expectations and recent government policy announcements as factors supporting reform.
- **Future Accessibility Framework:** Francois emphasised the importance of a consistent regulatory framework, including clear standards, accountability mechanisms and ongoing involvement of people with lived experience in the design and implementation of reforms.
- **Department's input:** Sam advised that the department is developing draft legislation following the Government's announcement and intends to undertake public consultation as part of the process.

Discussion:

- Members discussed the quality and availability of captioning services, including concerns regarding coverage, accuracy, delays and complaints processes.
- Members highlighted the importance of collaboration between deaf and blind communities to support the development of effective accessibility reforms.
- Discussion also touched on accessibility arrangements across subscription and on-demand services.

Agenda item 3: Video Relay 24/7 expansion and Platform Enhancement project updates

Presenter: Lincoln Blake, Concentrix

Lincoln Blake provided an update on the National Relay Service (NRS) Video Relay Service (VRS) expansion to 24/7 operations and the progress of the Platform Enhancement Project. He advised that the phased expansion approach has enabled Concentrix to assess call volumes, recruit and train additional interpreters, and progressively extend operating hours while minimising service risk.

Key points included:

- 24/7 VRS Expansion: Concentrix has successfully completed the initial expansion milestones, including extending weekday and weekend service hours to midnight. The next phase will introduce overnight weekday coverage from 28 September, with full 24/7 operation, including weekends, expected by the end of October.
- Workforce and Operational Readiness: Progress has been supported through interpreter recruitment and training, technology and equipment upgrades, updated workforce arrangements, and targeted communications and community engagement activities.
- Service Demand: Early experience from the extended operating hours indicates relatively low demand is likely after midnight, providing greater confidence in planning staffing and operational requirements for full 24/7 coverage.
- Platform Enhancement Project: Lincoln advised that a new Video Relay platform is being developed and refined based on feedback received during a pilot conducted earlier in the year. Additional testing with users is planned before implementation.
- Future Functionality: The new platform is expected to deliver enhanced user experience and accessibility features, including improved third-party calling functionality, skill-based call routing and Auslan voicemail capability.
- Implementation approach: Concentrix intends to implement the new platform after the 24/7 service expansion has stabilised to minimise disruption and reduce implementation risk.

Discussion:

- Sam welcomed the progress of both initiatives and noted the importance of the platform enhancements, including support for emergency call prioritisation and triage.
- Lincoln reported that feedback from pilot participants and interpreters has been positive.

Agenda item 4: Disability Strategy updates

Presenter: Bronwyn Morrish, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Bronwyn Morrish provided an update on work under Australia's Disability Strategy, including the development of the Accessible Information and Communications Associated Plan, the midterm evaluation of the Strategy, and a range of related accessibility initiatives.

Key points included:

- **Accessible Information and Communications Associated Plan:** DHDA is developing an associated plan to support more consistent and accessible government communications for people with disability. Consultation is underway with governments, technical experts, disability representative organisations and people with disability. Supporting work includes the development and testing of draft standards and guidance materials, and research by Monash University examining communication accessibility, best practice and the role of artificial intelligence.
- **Auslan Workforce Analysis:** DHDA has commissioned the University of New South Wales to undertake an analysis of Auslan workforce supply and demand, with consultation and data collection currently being planned.
- **Departmental Accessibility Capability:** Bronwyn highlighted DHDA's in-house accessibility services, including Easy Read production, Auslan translation and interpretation, and accessible engagement planning, noting increased organisational demand for these services.
- **Disability Strategy Evaluation:** Bronwyn outlined the midterm evaluation of Australia's Disability Strategy, including consultation opportunities, accessible participation options and opportunities for stakeholder engagement. She noted that the evaluation will assess progress made since the Strategy commenced in 2021 and help inform future priorities.
- **Disability Royal Commission:** Bronwyn advised that separate reporting is also underway on implementation of the Disability Royal Commission recommendations, with findings from the Strategy evaluation expected to complement this work.

Discussion:

- Hayley Stone raised concerns regarding advocacy sector involvement in consultation activities and sought clarification on the proposed accessibility standards and their potential legislative status.
- Bronwyn acknowledged the feedback and undertook to continue engagement with disability advocacy organisations and stakeholders as the work progresses.
- Members discussed opportunities for future consultation on both the Accessible Information and Communications Associated Plan and the Auslan workforce analysis.

Agenda item 5: General discussion and feedback

Jonathon raised concerns about the consistency of accessible communications during emergencies and disasters across Australia. He noted that people with disability, including people who are deaf, blind or deafblind, can experience varying levels of access to critical information depending on the jurisdiction and agency responsible for communications. He suggested the committee consider a work program on accessible emergency communications and explore engagement with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and other relevant bodies. He highlighted the potential for Commonwealth agencies to share knowledge, good practice and accessibility standards with state and local governments to improve consistency of emergency messaging.

Sam acknowledged the value of the proposal and advised that the department has established relationships with NEMA. The department will explore options for inviting relevant representatives, including NEMA and other agencies involved in emergency communications, to a future committee meeting to discuss current arrangements and opportunities for improvement.

Bronwyn suggested similar engagement with public health agencies.

Agenda item 6: Wrap Up and Close

Sam thanked all participants for their contributions, including the interpreters that facilitated the meeting. Sam noted that the next meeting will be scheduled in a couple of months.

The meeting closed at approximately 11:05 AM.

Action item

Action item	Due date	Responsibility	Status
DITRDCSA to engage with NEMA and other relevant agencies to arrange for representatives to attend a future meeting and discuss current accessible emergency communications initiatives and opportunities to improve consistency of accessible communications during emergencies across jurisdictions.	By next meeting	DITRDCSA	Open