

**RESPONSE TO
FUNDING PEAK BODIES –
A DISCUSSION PAPER**

AUSTRALIAN CEREBRAL PALSY ASSOCIATION

Overview

The work of self-funded peak bodies like the Australian Cerebral Palsy Association (ACPA) is unrecognised in the discussion paper which means the discussion paper presents an incomplete view of the representation provided by peak bodies in Australia.

Because it is self-funded, the ACPA has no stake in the current funding arrangements and presents its views in that light.

ACPA argues that there is strategic benefit to the Government encouraging peak bodies to work smarter and more cooperatively. The ACPA believes peak bodies themselves resolving the issues Government perceives need addressing best achieve this. This will create ownership of solutions and a more coherent framework for peak bodies to work in.

Furthermore, the ACPA believes the Government's investment in obtaining expert advice should be considered paramount, as it is axiomatic with any investment in planning. ACPA's view is that there is insufficient government funding for peak bodies in Australia.

The current level of funding for peaks is not significant considering the business of Government and the cost of disadvantaged groups to the Australian taxpayer. If additional funding for peaks is required, it will repay itself many times as the nation's support mechanisms for disadvantaged people are further developed through agendas such as Welfare Reform, Taxation Reform, etc.

The ACPA believes that there is insufficient funding of peak bodies and that an administrative re-organisation of existing funding to address these issues will weaken Government's investment in planning for the future.

There are many opportunities to improve peak body representation and efficacy and this is outlined in three sections of this paper:

- Sectors without Peak Representation
- The Relationship between Government and Funded Peak Bodies
- Consumer Involvement

Background to the Australian Cerebral Palsy Association

In Australia, the disability sector has a unique history that has been heavily influenced by the institutionalisation and subsequent de-institutionalisation processes. People with disabilities have been one of the most marginalised, and at risk groups in our community. Disability peak groups were established to

minimise the risks to groups particularly at times of significant changes to public policy and are very much a reflection of community values and interest.

To that end, there are a number of peak bodies. Many are funded by Government and some, like the ACPA, are not funded by Government. Regardless of funding, peak bodies exist to reflect the views of the community, particularly those affected by or interested in disability.

The ACPA represents individuals and organisations providing services to people with cerebral palsy and other similar disabilities and their families across Australia. The Association is supported through its membership.

Established in 1953, ACPA, has sought to provide a national focus for disability awareness, service development for children and adults with cerebral palsy and other disabilities and many issues reflecting community values such as integration, acceptance and valuing of people with disabilities.

Since 1997, ACPA has extended its scope and membership through a revised constitution to include a range of individuals and organisations in addition to established State and Territory Spastic Centres and Cerebral Palsy Associations.

Currently, ACPA has a membership of 14 organisations and 23 individuals. The combined services of these organisations exceeds \$200million with services to over 10,000 people.

Sectors without Peak Representation

The Discussion Paper seeks a solution, which is “more logical and easier to administer”, and argues for a re-distribution of funds between disability peaks to free funding for groups not adequately represented.

However, it does not follow that this can be resolved through an administrative reorganisation of funding. Creating a single peak body may provide a single view, but it runs a serious risk of being an unrepresentative view rather than providing views representative of a diverse community of people. Furthermore, it ignores the position of peak bodies such as the ACPA and does not allow self-funded peaks adequate representation.

There are several opportunities for improvement regarding funding for peak bodies:

- The development of a national council or federation of disability peak bodies, with a mandate to ensure there is whole of government point for exchange of information and development of process. This federation would not replace existing peaks or their funding, but ensure a timely and coherent national information exchange. Membership of this federation would be made up of

elected representatives of existing peak bodies, funded and non-funded. The administration of such a federation should be hosted by an existing peak body to ensure efficiency and economy, however, it would require additional Government funding.

- Existing peaks such as ACROD, should be examined for their capacity to host the administration of other peaks, providing economies of scale. Where possible, the Government should encourage this with the necessary infrastructure funding. The principle of partnerships between peak bodies such as ACROD and organisations like ACPA is supported by the ACPA.
- The above require a cross disability sector study that allows adequate time for all options to be considered. This is based on the premise that the disability sector is best placed to advise Government on how to improve peak representation.

The Relationship between Government and Funded Peak Bodies

The discussion paper seems to be based on a premise that the Government dictates how peak bodies should look and operate. This is a misplaced assumption given that Government has little or no say over the vast majority of peaks not funded by Government. However, where Government does provide funding, it has a clear right to ensure accountability for funding, without adversely affecting the ability of peaks to represent their membership.

Disability peak bodies, including the ACPA, focus on influencing or producing changes in society to positively affect the quality of life of people with disabilities. Peak bodies act to affect changes in:

- Government legislation;
- Government, non-government and private sector policies, practices and services;
- Attitudes and understanding of the general community.

Disability peak bodies speak with and on behalf of people with disabilities and are reliant on strong linkages with:

- People with disabilities, their families and carers;
- Other peak bodies; and
- Disability organisations;

in order to identify the issues that are of greatest concern and priority to people with disabilities.

Peak bodies are required because many people with disabilities are vulnerable and their needs, often ignored. This is a result of a number of factors, including:

- The degree to which society values people with disabilities. They have not been perceived as having the same needs, aspirations and rights as other members of society. Significant abuses and prejudice has occurred in the past because of these attitudes, and is still occurring today.
- The way in which society values people with disabilities has resulted in a paucity of funding and commitment from the major tiers of Government. The significant endeavours of agencies to raise funds from the public and business communities will never fill this gap;
- The degree to which people with disabilities are often isolated, institutionalised and forgotten by society
- Key and multiple issues surrounding accommodation support, employment, alternatives to employment, recreation, therapy and professional services, respite, ageing carers etc
- The special and sometimes unique issues facing specific diagnostic groups

The ACPA believes that peak bodies have a role in:

- Participative and inclusive social policy development and implementation processes;
- Sharing the responsibility of developing social policy across the public and private sectors; and
- Providing access to information to ensure participative and inclusive social policy development; and

The ACPA believes that the Government has a responsibility to support these functions. In return for Government support, those peak bodies should ensure:

- Credible consultative processes exist;
- Transparency in decision making;
- Accountability for to Government and membership for funding; and
- The delivery of agreed outputs.

The nature of this relationship should form the basis of any contract between government and funded peak bodies to ensure the best possible information for Government in making decisions that may affect people with disabilities.

Funded peak bodies in the disability sector cannot be seen merely as an extension of government but as a reflection of our society. Any new funding model requires the careful consideration and ownership of the disability sector.

ACPA believes that it is the nature of the contract between Government and the peak bodies that ensures administrative accountability, transparency in decision-making and appropriate consultative mechanisms. A re-organisation “for administrative ease” of funding will not achieve this.

Consumer Involvement

ACPA allows both individual and organisational membership and has developed a deep insight into the role that both individual consumers and organisations themselves play in peak representation. Many of ACPA's membership organisations are overseen by Boards of Management that include consumers.

The Discussion Paper proposes that, to be eligible for funding, peak disability organisations must “be managed and directed by consumers (or a typical cross-section of consumers)”.

This approach does not recognise that both consumer and systemic peak representation are integral to ensuring the rights, interests and well being of people with disabilities are safeguarded and advanced.

Peak bodies that are based on organisational membership perform their role successfully because of strong linkages with

- People with disabilities, their families and carers
- Individual advocacy and other systemic advocacy organisations
- Disability organisations

The Government runs the risk of creating a system that ignores the role peak bodies representing disability organisations, and consequently, advice to Government will lack balance.

ACPA believes that there is a role for both peak bodies made up of consumers, and peak bodies made up of disability organisations within in future funding framework.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Need for Change

1. Peak bodies have indicated they want change.

There is always a constant need to evaluate practices. There is also a need for a whole of government and community sector approach to address inequities within, and across our communities. A change in one area of social policy will almost always have a net affect on another area. Peak groups do need to work with each other, as indeed do all levels of government, but reducing the number of peaks merely cuts the number of voices speaking out about issues, it does not mean an improvement in representation.

The major issue is lack of funding to peaks and there is a need for increased funding by the Government for peak bodies.

2. Each sector needs a fairer funding share.

At different stages of social policy implementation, there are groups in need of varying amounts of peak funding. There is a concern that inadequate resourcing of one sector may lead to another sector's disadvantage in order to meet the needs of other sectors

The major issue is lack of funding to peaks and there is a need for increased funding by the Government for peak bodies.

"Fair" is not defined. If it means each sector shall get a more equal share in the same level of funding, then this will be ultimately, unfair to people with disabilities.

3. Improved funding certainty

Agreed that triennial funding would probably lead to certainty and assist in longer term planning.

4. Improved accountability and audit procedures

Agree with outcomes of Morgan Disney & Associates Report

5. Government wishes to support peaks that truly represent their sectors and are consumer driven

Conflicting views on significant social policy changes are inevitable and are to be valued. The challenge is to create accessible opportunities, that allow equitable input. “True” representation is directly linked to appropriate resources. However, by any definition of systemic representation, ACROD is clearly the major representative body.

6. Avoid duplication and fill funding gaps

There is always a clear need to avoid duplication of resources and effort, this is not the same as removing organisations who have similar goals etc but who do not duplicate or waste resources. Quite often, the more peaks/organisations advocating on issues means more power is ultimately exercised. Nevertheless, it is recognised that the disability sector needs support in reducing duplication and better coordinating input from a range of target groups.

7. Encourage the disabilities and families sectors to create their own peaks

A one off project based funding allocation to develop an approach that better meets the needs of the sector and government is recommended. Simply de-funding one group for another would create enormous division and a sector ill equipped to appropriate comment on and influence policy.

8. Develop world “best practice” funding arrangements

Agreed. Funding programs need to be entrenched in a sound philosophical base of equitable participative democracy. The funding programs should also have a connection with other government funding programs.

A Possible Funding Model

What do you consider to be the minimum amount of money required to fund (a) Level One, umbrella organisations and (b) Level Two, satellite organisations?

This is a very unfair question and will ultimately create division.

Which option is preferred for Level One - structured (a) in line with the Department's Outcomes, (b) against broad joint sectors or (c) other?

One- off project funding to facilitate the best model.

What is the best process for creating a new single peak organisation eg for the disability sector, the families sector?

One- off project funding to facilitate the best model.

Would you prefer that a single peak organisation represent the disability sector?

No. A range of peaks should represent the range of needs from people with disabilities. It may be appropriate that one group takes responsibility for coordinating responses/advice to government. The above mentioned project would develop the most acceptable recommendation.

What is your view of the option under Level Two for subdividing the disability sector into five groups?

Perpetuates a view of disability along diagnostic groups rather than the needs of all people with disabilities.

- **If you agree with this option, how do you suggest this could be achieved?**
- As mentioned above, fund a project to get there. Involve the current peaks in the development of their preferred model. It may take a little longer, but it will be a "true" (or "truer") representative model
- **If you disagree with this option can you suggest another option and a process for achieving it?**

As above

- **Should organisations that represent service providers be funded under this model?**

Yes

Should organisations that represent service providers be funded and administered separate to that of consumer organisations?

This is along the lines of systemic advocacy vs individual advocacy, and at a conceptual level, systemic and consumer issues should be separated. However, this is difficult to achieve as many of us represent consumer and systemic issues.

How could working relationships be improved? (Ie, within the sector, between sectors and with government.)

National peak meetings, across sector, across government etc. A national register of peak groups and their key priorities would be beneficial. This could be electronic and be coordinated by the funding program.

What do you consider the peak organisation's best mechanism for ensuring effective consultation with their members and with government?

Information dissemination, through service delivery networks.

What kinds of initiatives could be funded to promote organisation best practice in operating as a national secretariat?

- Incentives to groups
- Positive approaches
- Show casing
- Linkage with the range of government portfolios eg., Treasury, IR etc.,
- Funding of international high profile social change/influencers speakers accessible to peak groups