



19 December 2013

Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) thanks the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee for the opportunity to contribute to its Commonwealth Procurement Procedures Inquiry.

While ACCAN understands that the primary focus of the inquiry is the effectiveness of current procurement policies in preferencing Australian products and services, we request the Committee consider the implications of current Commonwealth procurement policies in meeting the needs of Australians with disability, specifically in the procurement of information and communications technologies (ICT).

ACCAN, in alliance with a majority of Australian peak disabled peoples' organisations (DPOs) has a specific interest in the Commonwealth's procurement policies for ICTs. Currently, there is no inclusion of accessibility features in the Commonwealth's request for tender (RFT) procedures. Accessible ICT is information and communications technologies that enable people with disabilities to use functions provided by computer hardware and software on an equal basis with others.ⁱ This includes computer software and hardware, websites, mobile devices, e-readers, telephones and office equipment.

ACCAN recommends that the Committee call for the adoption of a whole-of-government procurement policy for accessible ICT as part of future Commonwealth agency procurement procedures.

There are a number of significant benefits for the Government, society and for people with disability when accessibility is considered in all aspects of ICT procurement. Incorporating accessibility requirements in public procurement contracts can:

- increase employment possibilities for people with disability in the public service,
- increase productivity - accessible ICT is more usable by people with differing abilities,
- ensure that Government information and services are accessible for all Australians including people with disability,
- ameliorate the extraordinary cost of retro-fitting inaccessible ICT products and services,
- encourage manufacturers to develop a wider range of accessible and usable products and services available in the wider ICT marketplace,
- mitigate the risk of Australia becoming the dumping ground for inaccessible ICT products and services which cannot be marketed in other jurisdictions with procurement policies for accessible ICT,

- bolster the Commonwealth Government's commitments enshrined in the National Disability Strategy, and
- mitigate the risk of litigation under the Disability Discrimination Act and the international Human Rights instruments that Australia is signatory to.

The 2013 House Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications inquiry into IT Pricingⁱⁱ recommended the Commonwealth consider adopting a whole-of-government procurement policy for accessible IT, as follows:

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider a whole-of-government accessible IT procurement policy, to be developed by relevant agencies including AGIMO, and in consultation with relevant stakeholder groups including ACCAN.

ACCAN would like to draw the Committee's attention to the following resources which highlight the significant benefits realised through adoption of public procurement policies for accessible ICT.

1. Disability Community Position Statement < <http://accan.org.au/our-work/policy/627-position-statement-ict-procurement>>
2. Accessible Communication: Tapping the Potential in Public ICT Procurement Policy <http://accan.org.au/files/Accessible_Communications_Report_Accessible.pdf>
3. Section 508 of the US Rehabilitation Act (1973)www.section508.gov/
4. European Commission Mandate 376
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/standards_policy/mandates/database/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.detail&id=333

ACCAN is happy to assist the Committee in further consideration of our recommendations Please contact Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Advisor

ⁱ See EU. (2011a). Consultation Document: European Accessibility Act [Web page]. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved 19 January 2012, from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/2011-12-13_consultation_background_document.pdf

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http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=ic/itpricing/report.htm