

## **CONCESSIONS REVIEW**

People With Disabilities ACT welcomes the proposed cyclical review and suggests that these reviews include input from stakeholders. While People With Disabilities ACT notes the use of financial modeling, the social benefits of the concessions scheme should not be ignore by relying on financial modeling to assess the real value of a particular scheme. The processing of concession applications needs to be streamlined to reduce the administration workloads. It seems that as costs rise, subsidies have not risen to match them. This has lead to more of a user pays system for people with disabilities. While any concession is better than nothing, the large amounts of money that people with disabilities need to pay for goods and services because of their disability, means that this vulnerable group is living closer to the poverty line.

### ➤ SENIORS CARD

It needs to have reciprocal rights in all States and Territories. In the ACT holders of Senior's cards only get concession fares on ACTION buses for off peak periods. Why should they be penalized for wanting to travel by public transport at peak times?

### ➤ PHARMACY CARDS

It needs to be provided to everyone with a permanent disability to help offset the high cost of medications, without being tied to a Centrelink payment.

### ➤ TAXI SUBSIDY VOUCHERS

There is not enough funds in the Taxi Subsidy Scheme. It could cover more people. The cost of taxi travel is so high that it is only worthwhile for short distances. The government subsidy for every trip needs to increase in line with taxi fares. There is also the problem that ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme Vouchers are not readily accepted by all interstate drivers. People who are eligible for the 50% subsidy are entitled to \$17 per trip, while those eligible for a 75% subsidy are entitled to a maximum of \$26 per trip. This is not a lot to receive when you consider that the estimated cost of a trip from Tuggeranong to Gungahlin is \$60.39. On public holidays this increases to \$68.99.(Canberra Cabs fare cost estimator: [www.canberracabs.com.au](http://www.canberracabs.com.au)) People are only considered eligible if their disability is severe enough to prevent them from using public transport. Because not all bus routes in the ACT are accessible or the time table or routes might not suit everyone, people with disabilities should have the option of subsidized public and taxi transport.

### ➤ EQUIPMENT SCHEME

The Equipment Scheme is highly unsatisfactory. It only subsidizes equipment for people with physical disabilities with the aim of keeping them in their own homes. It is our understanding that the Equipment Scheme's contribution on wheelchairs has not increased from \$1800 for over a decade, yet individual contributions by

eligible clients has increased in line with price increases of their wheelchairs. Initially it was 10% or \$180 and the Scheme picked up the difference up to the full cost of the wheelchair. Now, clients pay the \$180 plus the difference between the \$1800 less the 10% or \$180 eg \$1620 and the full price.

➤ **LOW VISION AIDS SCHEME**

The maximum subsidy paid by the Low Vision Aids Scheme is \$100 every two years. People must be on a centrelink pension and be assessed by Vision Australia to qualify. For people with vision impairments the present cost of aids is prohibitively expensive. For example it costs \$1700 for screen readers, \$1500 for print scanners, \$2420 for talking GPS systems, \$600 for talking web browsers and up to \$5000 for video magnifiers. While there are Department of Education and Workplace Training grants for such equipment for people with vision impairments in employment, people not in the workforce with vision impairments have to rely on a mere \$100. The concession scheme needs to take into account the social value of making people more independent through such aids. Their cost needs to be balanced with long term benefits to the individual.