



Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

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Senate Standing Committee on
Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
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The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committee Inquiry into the Performance of Australia Post and LPOs.

AFDO has been established as a primary national voice to Government that fully represents the interests of people with disability across Australia. The mission of AFDO is to champion the rights of people with disability in Australia and help them participate fully in Australian life.

Importance of the local Post office

The local Post Office has traditionally been a gathering point in local communities. With electronic forms of communication becoming more prevalent, it is understandable that the need for surface mail has decreased. However, AFDO would not like to see local Post Offices close.

As with on-line shopping replacing face-to-face interactions with local businesses, businesses are being encouraged to develop strategies to keep their customers. AFDO recommends that local Post Offices do the same. Post Offices have diversified their facilities and services to include bill paying hubs and retail outlets, which we believe has been successful in contributing to their sustainability. These initiatives need to be maintained and expanded to local Post Office viable and open.

Physical access problems at Post Offices in rural locations

In rural areas there are many Post Offices that are not accessible to people with a disability. Often these Post Offices are located in older buildings with steps which make access difficult, or impossible, for people with a physical disability, older people and people who are blind or vision impaired.

In addition to inaccessible buildings, some Post Offices have very cluttered merchandise displays, severely reducing circulation space making it difficult for people who use mobility devices to move around.

Although Australia Post has a Disability Action Plan, improvements to access to facilities and services do not always filter down to individual Post Offices. Operators of local Post Offices see themselves as small business operators and thus disconnected from the Australia Post Disability Action Plan. AFDO recommends that Australia Post make compliance with their Disability Action Plan a condition of being appointed a Local Post Office. This would not only make all Post Offices more accessible over time, it would also promote the employment of people with a disability and raise awareness of disability in local communities.

Issues and recommendations from Blind Citizens Australia

Blind Citizens Australia is a member of AFDO which represents Australians who are blind or vision impaired. Please see below a list of issues and recommendations provided to AFDO for inclusion in this submission.

1. At home status

Based on member feedback, mail deliverers have on a number of occasions not thoroughly checked that individuals are home before opting to put an undelivered mail notice in individuals letter boxes.

Recommendation:

Blind Citizens Australia would like to recommend that Australia Post postal workers thoroughly check that individuals are not home before placing an 'undelivered mail notice' in letter boxes. This will prevent any unnecessary stress placed on individuals who are blind or vision impaired in having to plan how to retrieve their mail despite being home to accept the mail.

2. Notice Cards

It is often difficult for individuals who are blind or vision impaired to identify 'undelivered mail' notice cards left in letter boxes as there are no distinguishing features of the card that indicate that the card is not junk mail.

Recommendation: Blind Citizens Australia would like to recommend that Australia Post reconsider the card design and ensure to highlight key features of the notice card. Blind Citizens Australia would like to suggest embossing 'Australia Post' in Braille or ensuring the card is at least large print. Another alternative could be to emboss 'AP' on a top right hand corner of the card to enable individuals to distinguish this card. The card material should also be from distinguishable material (e.g. thicker cardboard).

3. Undelivered Mail Pick up locations

It is often difficult for blind or vision impaired individuals to retrieve mail that has been sent to a location other than their local post office. Individuals who are blind or vision impaired are often trained by professional orientation and mobility instructors to access familiar areas within the local community. Mail to be picked up in alternative locations (such as a mail exchange location) can often create barriers for those who are blind or vision impaired who are unable to drive and rely on others to assist or are required to use unfamiliar public transport in unfamiliar areas to retrieve the mail.

Recommendation: Blind Citizens Australia would like to recommend that Australia Post consider sending undelivered mail to local post offices that are more convenient and accessible for those who are blind or vision impaired. Alternatively, Australia Post could reconsider a system where individuals are offered options on where the parcel can be sent or when it can be resent.

4. Impact of digital technology

It is important to note that accessibility of technology systems (iphone applications or websites) is a crucial factor in enabling an individual who is blind or vision impaired to access vital information. As individuals who are blind or vision impaired often rely on the use of screen reading software to access online information, websites should be written to be accessible to this software.

Recommendation: Blind Citizens Australia would like to recommend that Australia Post ensure that any technology applications that are created are written to be accessible (e.g. accessible websites with audio instructions, audio security codes). It is also important to note that PDF files should be provided in alternative formats such as word or rich text format which can be taken by different word processors.

Blind Citizens Australia would also like Australia Post to consider the use of SMS or email options to provide updates to customers as another accessible technology solution.

5. Inaccuracy of delivery

It is vital that mail is delivered accurately to individuals who are blind or vision impaired as it is difficult to immediately distinguish whether there have been any errors in delivery. Depending on the individual who is blind or vision impaired, irregular assistance may be available to read the mail. This can create potential issues for general customers who are expecting important information to be delivered.

Recommendation: Blind Citizens Australia would like to recommend that Australia Post ensure that individuals employed by Australia Post should have a standard level of literacy skills to deliver mail accurately.

6. Passport photos

There will be instances where people who are blind or vision impaired will take passport photos that do not follow the usual passport photo specifications. This includes looking directly at the camera etc.

There has been an instance where an individual who had attempted to have his passport photos taken in an Australia Post Office was asked to take his passport photos elsewhere as the computer system was unable to print out a non complaint photo. The individual was then required to go to a chemist, have a photo taken and pay for a signed letter certifying that he is vision impaired.

Recommendation: Blind Citizens Australia would recommend that strategies be put in place to prevent people who are blind or vision impaired to be denied access to a service that individuals in the community are normally able to access. This includes investigation into other computer systems to allow photos to be printed despite being 'non complaint' to the usual passport photo.

Should you require any further information regarding this submission, please contact Bill Lawler

Regards,

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