



Council for Intellectual Disability

POSITION STATEMENT ON TECHNOLOGY

October 2021

What is technology?

Technology covers a wide range of devices used to communicate and obtain services. For example, smartphones, tablets, apps, websites, call centres and interactive information screens.

Our goal

People with intellectual disability have access to technology that is designed to meet their needs. They also can deal direct with another person if they are uncomfortable with technology.

Where things stand

There is very limited research on technology use and people with intellectual disability but we know a lot from the experience of our members.

Accessible technology can assist people with intellectual disability to communicate and use services on an equal basis with others.

However, a requirement rather than a choice to use technology results in exclusion of people who find technology hard to use or cannot afford it.

More and more agencies expect their customers to use technology to access their services, for example banks, government agencies and retailers. There is less and less face to face and direct phone service.

App developers and other technology developers rarely take into consideration access needs of people with intellectual disability.

In Australia, there are standards for accessible websites (the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), but the standards do not take into account the needs of people with intellectual disability.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP) enshrines the right to accessible information and communications, but Information and technology provided by governments and businesses are rarely accessible for people with intellectual disability.

Discrimination legislation says that organisations must provide services to people with disability in a way that works for them unless this will impose an “unjustifiable hardship” on the organisation.

The NSW Disability Inclusion Act requires State government agencies to prepare disability inclusion action plans.

Case studies

MARIA (not her real name) has intellectual disability and uses public transport regularly. Maria cannot use apps on her phone due to limited dexterity in her arms and hands. She relies on talking to transport staff or calling the information line to find out travel times and transport information. Maria became very anxious when the government wanted to remove the transport info line as this would remove her ability to use public transport and leave her isolated.

ROBERTO (not his real name) lost his disability pension card and went to Services Australia to get a replacement. He was told that they could not assist him and that he would need to go online to order a new card. Roberto struggles to use a computer and found it overwhelming when he tried to sign up for an online account and complete the identification verification process.

FRAN (not her real name) has lived in the same suburb all her life, uses a wheelchair and made her house and outside areas accessible. Her neighbour wanted to knock down and rebuild a two storey house. Fran was very worried that the new house would overshadow her accessible vegetable garden and that she would no longer have views of the city. The local council told her that the only way to see the neighbour’s plans and make an objection was over the internet. Fran cannot use the internet and so feels powerless to do anything about the neighbour’s plans. objection all needs to be done online. Fran can’t use the internet and has no other option to lodge an objection to the local council.

What is the solution?

- All government departments and services should be required to provide the option of face-to-face or phone communication for people with Enshrine in law the right of people with intellectual disability to Easy Read and other accessible information.
- Support people with intellectual disability to use discrimination complaints and other legal processes to achieve systemic change.
- Change the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to include the accessibility needs of people with intellectual disability.
- Change the Australian Digital Service Standards to include cognitive accessibility.
- Consult with people with intellectual disability throughout development of technology.
- Further research on the facilitators and barriers to use of technology by people with intellectual disability.
- Include information on cognitively accessible technology in engineering studies and degrees.
- Measure cognitive accessibility when evaluating any proposed or existing technology.
- Use process evaluations that include steps to determine whether technology is the best option to meet any particular need.
- Include action on the above steps in the new Australian Disability Strategy and disability inclusion action plans of NSW government agencies.
- The National Disability Insurance Agency should make itself a role model of cognitive accessibility.

What CID has done

Our technology advocacy has included:

- Supporting people with intellectual disability to participate in consultations about technology including transport, banking and app development.
- Leading community advocacy against restricting access to the Transport Info line for trip planning.
- Supporting a person with intellectual disability to be on the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network access committee.
- Creating guides such as for inclusive on-line meetings for people with intellectual disability.

What CID has achieved

- Prevented the Transport Infoline being closed for trip planning for people with disability.
- Made our website accessible for people with intellectual disability and consulted multiple people with intellectual disability through the development process.
- Assisted other organisations to make their websites more accessible for people with intellectual disability.
- Continued to offer other forms of accessible communication as well as technology to CID members and staff.