Australian Association
of the Deaf Inc.

DISABILITY EQUIPMENT PROGRAM (DEP)
Discussion Paper

Introduction

This paper was developed by AAD's Deaf Telecommunication Access and Networking Project (DTAN) Officers and made available to the Deaf Community to discuss a future Disability Equipment Program (DEP).

The DEP provides equipment to assist Deaf; hearing and speech impaired people to access the telephone network.

Over the past 12 months, there has been a lot of debate about how the DEP should be provided. Organisations such as the Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) and Telecommunications Disability Consumer Representation project (TEDICORE) have released public discussion papers about their views on how the program should be provided. The Deaf community is a major user of the DEP so it makes sense for AAD to put forward a position on this issue. This discussion paper provides an opportunity to consult with our members and inform the community on issues surrounding different program models for the DEP.

We hope that feedback from the community will enable us to formulate an agreed position prior to AAD's Annual General Meeting in May 2002.

In this discussion paper, we will examine critical concerns surrounding the current situation. We will outline all the criteria we believe should be in a DEP and provide two possible program models that build on the current program. In Appendix A you will find a time-line outlining the important milestones that have impacted on the development and operation of the current DEP.

Glossary

This document contains some important acronyms that may be confusing for the reader. To assist with understanding, a Glossary of terms is attached as Appendix B.

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Critical Issues

a) Carriage Service providers (CSP's)

By law, all CSP's that provide telephone equipment and a local service to the telephone network must provide disability equipment to ensure access to the telephone network. Currently there are two DEP's provided for the Australian Deaf Community. Each program has a different system of how to meet Deaf people's telecommunications needs. Both programs only focus on services to fixed lines (i.e. telephone handset lines) and not mobiles or other telecommunication systems.

The two programs are as follows:

TELSTRA	OPTUS
Superprint 4425 and Uniphone or computer modem	Superprint 4425 and Uniphone
Also provides:- • Visual Alert (flashing light for telephone) • Touchfone 400 (volume control phone) • General purpose alarm • Cochlear Implant telephone adapter • Telebraille • Tel 35 handsfree holdaphone • Additional sockets	No other equipment.
Contracts Printacall to organise delivery, repair and management of TTY and modem.	Optus manages program in house and trained technicians deliver equipment to the home
Must prove you are Deaf through an authorised professional (i.e. Dr, Audiologist, audiometrist)	Currently do not need to prove you are Deaf
Must be a Telstra customer	Must be an Optus customer
No Deaf employees involved in program	No Deaf employees involved in program

Table 1: Current DEP provision by CSP's

AAD is aware of two other companies that are registered CSP's: AAPT and Primus. These two companies do not provide a DEP.

People are complaining about the slow, delayed supply and delivery of equipment to the consumer. In addition, many people are frustrated at not being able to access smaller CSP's who provide customer equipment but do not provide disability equipment. The only way to force the other CSP's to provide disability equipment is to make a complaint to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC).

b) Consumer choice

Deaf people should have the right to choose which CSP best meets their needs. However, as previously stated, only two of four CSP's currently provide a DEP. Currently Telstra and Optus generally charge more for telephone access and usage costs compared to the smaller CSP's. They are

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the only companies that provide a DEP. Deaf people are not able to enjoy the advantages of a competitive market as is enjoyed by other Australians.

c) Family Members

Current DEP's do not allow for families of Deaf people to join. Some of AAD's members have said that this is unfair and unreasonable. They believe the program should be widened to include immediate family members such as parents or siblings.

d) Regulation on Equipment provision

As outlined in Table 1, the Telstra DEP provides the largest equipment range available. Optus currently only supplies a TTY but does not provide a visual alert. The list of equipment available is based on the provisions of the *Telecommunications (Equipment for the Disabled) regulations 1998*.

The equipment list in the regulations is a fixed list and does not require the CSP (eg. Telstra) to provide alternative equipment and meet individual needs.

The *Telecommunications (Equipment for the Disabled) regulations 1998* is limiting as it does not allow special equipment to be provided for people who may be Deaf and have a visual impairment. These people need a TTY with a large visual display unit. Nor does it allow for future technology (eg video telephony systems) that may be more appropriate for some consumer needs.

What do you want in the Disability Equipment Program (DEP)?

We have compiled a list of requirements that we feel should be included in any type of DEP. This is a comprehensive list but by no means the final list. We are now seeking input from Deaf people on other ideas that need to be in the program. This list is not in order of priority:

- A National comprehensive DEP program including program awareness, information, equipment choice, equipment provision, installation, training and on going support.
- A wide choice of equipment to meet needs of Deaf people
- Ability to hire equipment for long and/or short term use
- Must employ Deaf people to assist with providing services and be aware of Deaf issues*
- Able to access any CSP and choose a plan that suits Deaf person
- Consumer controlled and managed.
- Ongoing equipment training and installation to customers
- Funded through Universal Service Obligations from all CSP's
- Liaise closely with ACA, DCITA, ACIF and CSP's in terms of new equipment becoming available

This principle is consistent with CSP's in the UK, Canada and USA, where Deaf staff are employed to assist service provision.

Current legislation will have to be changed to include all the above.

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Who should provide the DEP?

Option 1.

Carrier Based Model: Telephone Carriers (CSP's) control and operate the individual DEP's with strong, directive advisory input from consumers.

Option 2.

Centralised Model: An organisation that is consumer led and managed to operate DEP. Consumers will have direct control and influence in operation of DEP.

The Carrier Based Model is the system that is currently being provided. There are a lot of discrepancies in the current service provision as outlined earlier in this discussion paper.

The Centralised model is a new option that has never been done before. In order to make it work, the Federal Government would need to introduce legislation into the Telecommunications Act to ensure that Disability Equipment Program services can be provided by a special organisation. The advantages outlined in the Centralised model are based on the principles of what we believe should be provided by a DEP model.

Table 2 (next page) outlines the benefits and disadvantages of each model. From feedback from the community, AAD will prepare a final position paper after ratification by AAD Board. Your input is extremely valuable to this process:

It is important to note that the advantages and disadvantages outlined in table 2 are based on how we believe each model should be delivered. The final model determined by all stakeholders may not be exactly how we would like it.

Conclusion

At present, AAD has not made a decision as to which model best meets the needs of the community. This discussion paper will hopefully stimulate a debate and provide an opportunity for the Deaf community to contribute ideas and thoughts to assist AAD in formulating a position. It is important to note that the final model may not be the perfect model for all our members but through this consultative process we will endeavour to ensure that people's comments have been included.

A recommendation will be made by DTAN to the AAD Board based on feedback from the Deaf community. The Board will then make a decision and announce at the AGM on 3 May 2002. The final position paper will be made public and could be improved from time to time if new information comes to hand.

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Closing date for feedback is Friday April 20th, 2002.

If you wish to provide feedback or ask questions, you can do one or all of the following: -

1. Contact the DTAN Officers via email:-
    Catherine Clark   cathy.clark@aad.org.au
    Phil Harper   phil.harper@aad.org.au

2. Visit AAD's website, check into DTAN discussion site and type your comments.
   www.aad.org.au

We look forward to receiving your comments and feedback.

Catherine Clark
Phil Harper
DTAN Project Officers

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Table 2: Comparison of two types of DEP models

Option 1		Option 2	
Carrier Based Model		**Centralised Model**	
Benefits	Disadvantages	Benefits	Disadvantages
Requires Carriers to provide standard Disability Equipment Program	Equipment available may be limited	One stop shop for all DEP equipment	Requires major Federal Government Legislative change; May mean that CSP's will not take responsibility for providing access to services for Deaf people
Meets requirements of Telecommunications Act	May decide to meet only minimum requirements. May not set up research into future technology	Provide a wide range of equipment and consumers can choose what they want. Will be flexible so that new and other equipment can be included from time to time.	Requires change in Telecommunications Act 1997.
Fulfils DDA requirements	May prefer to wait until complaint is lodged before providing any equipment.	Fulfils DDA requirements as all CSP's must comply with Act / Regulations to provide access. DDA complaint process not necessary	Costs to be covered by Carriers through USO – may not be properly funded
Encourages CSP's to compete for business by offering different technology packages (i.e. this TTY/Modem etc)	Service may be different according to company corporate culture and attitudes. Smaller CSP's may not provide a competitive DEP due to cost constraints. May be limited choice of equipment if we join a smaller CSP.	Services and information centralised providing all available products. Includes research component	Requires legislative change to ensure that all CSP's do not engage in unfair pricing and service delivery.
Funded by each Carrier as part of USO		Funded by each Carrier as part of USO	
Must be regulated to ensure basic equipment i.e. X type of TTY; Y type of flashing light and Z type of Mobile Phone	CSP's will not seek to provide attractive DEP and equipment provision outside the scope of the legislation	Equipment provision based on individual needs (eg Large Visual Display for Deaf person with visual impairment).	Requires legislative change to improve the current equipment list
Option to choose which CSP provides the best price / products	No guarantee that CSP offers good pricing plan and good DEP. No Deaf staff	Consumer managed and driven. May employ Deaf people and be sensitive to Deaf consumer issues	Will carriers still provide competitive pricing?

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Appendix A

Historical Milestones

The following milestones illustrate the evolution and current operation of the current DEP:

1992	Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is passed includes reference to making it unlawful for discrimination to occur in the provision of goods and services (Section 24). Goods and Services include provision of telecommunication services.
Pre-1995	Telstra through their social and community responsibility provides a selected range of equipment such as amplified handsets and visual light signal device to assist access to the telephone;
1995	Federal government funds the establishment of the National Relay Service (NRS) and a limited Disability Equipment program (NRS - TEA). Provision of TTY, modem and telebraille only available to those who are on pension, health or unemployment benefits.
1996	Telstra TTY program is established as a result of the HREOC facilitated Scott vs. Telstra case. NRS - TEA and Telstra TTY program co-exist, both being administered by ACE.
1997	Telecommunications Act 1997 saw changes to the legislation covering provision of the standard telephone service incorporating access to specialist equipment for people with a disability necessary to assist accessing the standard telephone. Telstra becomes the designated universal service provider requiring them to provide such necessary equipment to access their telephone network.
1998	Telecommunications (Equipment for the Disabled) regulations 1998 describe the universal service obligation incorporating supply of a standard telephone service to people with a disability, provision of a national Relay service and specifies customer equipment to be made available. Equipment includes, TTY, modem, telebraille and Touchfone 400 handset. Telstra TTY program and the NRS - TEA program are merged into the Telstra Disability Telecommunications Equipment Program. Telstra's DEP only available to those customers have a phone service with Telstra.
1999	Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Services Standards) Act 1999 refers to provisions of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and provision of a Disability Telecommunications Equipment Program. Telstra continues to be the Universal Service provider.
2000	Telstra establish a DEP Consumer Advisory Group to provide and advice and input into the operation of the DEP.

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2001   HREOC make it clear that Telecommunication Carriage Service Providers (CSP's) who supply customer service as part of or in association with their service are required to provide equipment which is accessible and useable by people with disabilities to access the telephone network (HREOC paper, Sept. 2001).

DCITA clarifies the rights and responsibilities of carriers in relation to disability equipment provision (DCITA paper, Sept. 2001).

Optus initiate a trial TTY program in NSW. Provision of the TTY program (no visual alert device) currently only available in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. No other equipment available as yet.

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Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

Disability Equipment Program (DEP)	Program to provide adaptive equipment to enable Deaf people (and people with disabilities) to access telecommunications services
Carriage Service Providers (CSP's)	Telephone companies that provide telephone equipment and a local service to the telephone network. (eg. Telstra)
Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)	Law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)	Government funded body responsible for discrimination law; also administers complaints under the DDA
Telecommunications Disability Consumer people Representation Project (TEDICORE)	Non-profit organisation that represents concerns of with disabilities on telecommunications issues.
Australian Communication Exchange (ACE)	Contracted provider of the National Relay Service (NRS)
Universal Service Obligation (USO)	The universal service obligation ensures that all people in Australia, no matter where they live or conduct business, have reasonable access, on an equitable basis, to standard telephone services and payphones.
Australian Communications Authority (ACA)	Government regulator monitoring CSP's and NRS
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA)	Government Department responsible for Telecommunications
Australian Communication Industry Forum (ACIF)	Peak body representing the Telecommunications industry
Telecommunications Act 1997	Legislation that covers telecommunications provision
Telecommunications (Equipment for the Disabled) Regulations 1998	Government Regulations that outline the types of equipment that must be provided under a DEP.

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