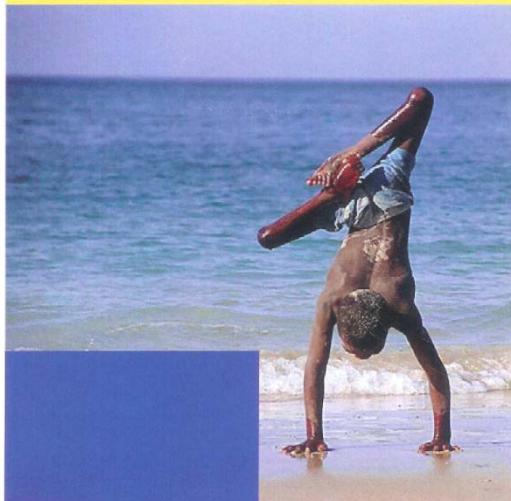


WORLD REPORT ON DISABILITY

THE WORLD REPORT ON DISABILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM
5–6 DECEMBER 2011

University of Sydney Symposium

6 December 2011

Environment & Inequalities

Implementing enabling environments

Michael Fox AM

Thank you for this opportunity – and following my extensive involvement with the UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD) – my focus today is on accessibility with emphasis on the importance of providing and maintaining a *continuous accessible path of travel*.

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This presentation consists of 3 components

- ❖ Outline of the access agenda in Australia
- ❖ Comments on the CRPD and WHO World Report on Disability
- ❖ Current access initiatives and programs including the University of Sydney

Outline of the access agenda in Australia

Access legislation awareness began in the 1970s and as an architect and recent graduate – any ‘accessible’ buildings were based on limited information and no access guidelines or legislation.

Accordingly Standards Australia decided to establish an Access Committee in 1974 – and I was the initial Chair until 1984. Thanks to a Federal Government grant we carried out extensive research and in 1981, the International Year of People with Disabilities (IYDP), produced Australian Access Standard AS1428 – based on the concept of a *continuous accessible path of travel*.

The scope of AS1428 included private and public buildings, all major building types and elements, and fixtures, fittings and equipment. Following extensive negotiations with government it was decided to split AS1428 into 2 documents – with AS1428.1 becoming the mandatory Standard – adopted into legislation for public buildings only – and AS1428.2 providing best practice information and guidelines. These Standards have been regularly updated since the 1980s, including the most recent update of AS1428.1 in 2009.

In 1992 The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was adopted by the Federal government and in 1993 Sydney was selected to host the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Following extensive lobbying, Federal and State governments recognised this best practice accessible environments opportunity – and I was involved with many people and organisations in implementing this program.

Australian Standard AS4299 on Adaptable Housing was developed in 1995 – and has been adopted by many local authorities across Australia to provide more equitable housing opportunities.

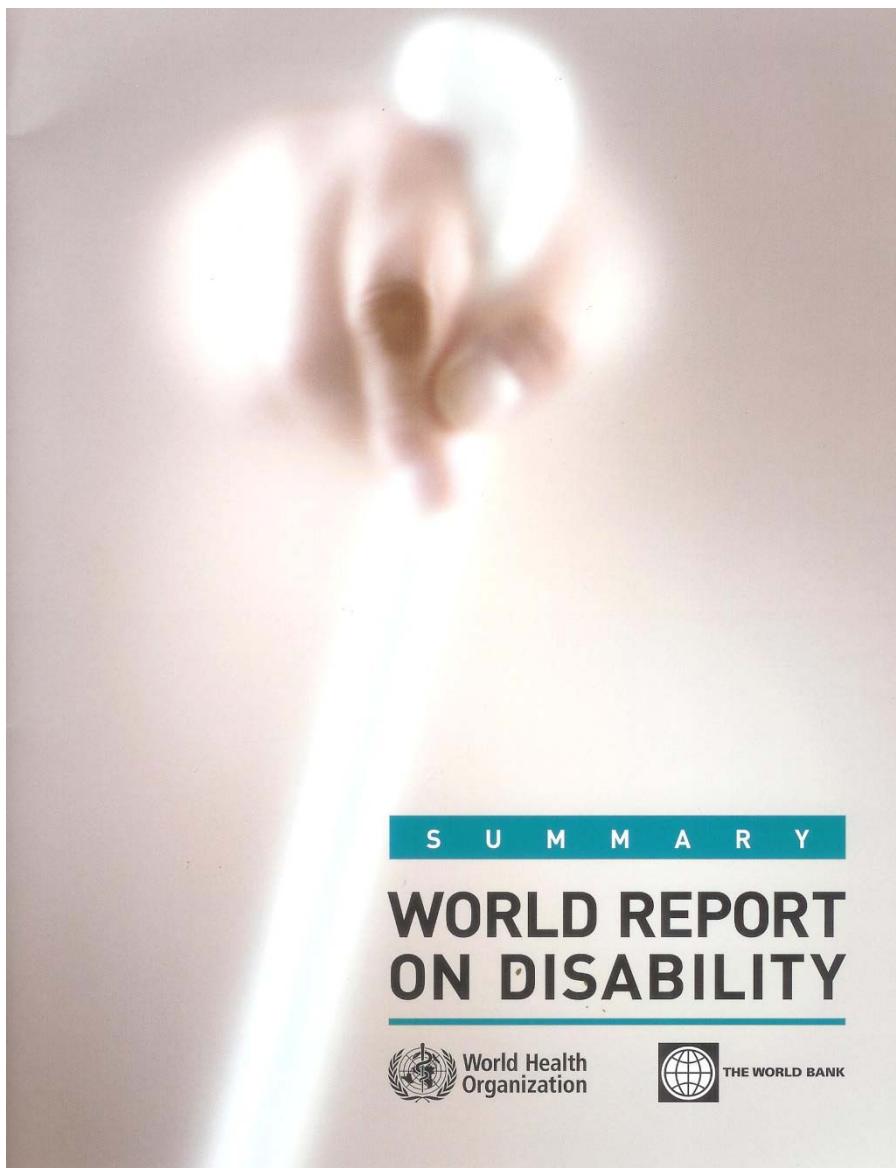
The Sydney 2000 program was based on a *continuous accessible path of travel* including adoption of a *process of access* linking information and communications, transportation, public domains, the built environment and fixtures, fittings and equipment. The Olympic and Paralympic Village, and the Media Village, incorporated adaptable and accessible housing criteria – and the Sydney 2000 experience set a bench mark for future access programs.

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Following wide ranging discussions and debate about access legislation – the Access to Premises Standard (APS) was adopted by the Federal government in 2010 and in May 2011 the Building Code of Australia (BCA) was significantly updated as the technical and legislative response to the APS.

The APS and BCA 2011 primarily relate to public buildings – and the next major challenge is legislate for mainstream adaptable and more liveable housing.

Similar legislation has been adopted in the UK and, with our ageing population, the social and economic importance of more equitable and easily adaptable and liveable housing needs to be a key objective for all stakeholders.



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Comments on the CRPD and WHO World Report on Disability

Since 2004 I have been closely involved in the CRPD drafting, debates, UN adoption and implementation worldwide. This involvement particularly related to Article 9 and global agreement that this important Article should be based on the *process of access* as we developed in Sydney in access planning strategies for Sydney 2000.

UN debate on CRPD Article 9, Accessibility, centred around acceptance of the premise that access is not just about buildings – and that accessible and equitable environments must provide and maintain continuous and accessible links between information, transport, public domains, the built environment and services.

A key aspect is that accessibility is a MEANS and not an OUTCOME. Accessibility is the means to providing equitable opportunities and outcomes – including education, employment and social inclusion.

Chapter 6 of the WHO World Report, Enabling Environments, also emphasises the interconnected nature of accessibility and the need for consistency.

WHO Recommendation 1 is to *Enable access to all mainstream policies, systems and services* and Recommendation 4 is to *Involve people with disabilities*. All stakeholders must be empowered and effectively involved to achieve equity and access – and during this Symposium one speaker suggested a new paradigm – *nothing about us without all of us*.

The WHO Report also refers most appropriately to the importance of a continuous ‘travel chain’.

The “travel chain” refers to all elements that make up a journey, from starting point to destination – including the pedestrian access, the vehicles, and the transfer points. If any link is inaccessible, the entire trip becomes difficult. Many mass transit providers, particularly in developing (and developed) countries, have implemented accessibility only partially, for example by providing a limited number of accessible vehicles on each route, making improvements only to the main stations, and providing access only on new lines.

Terminology is critically important – and the WHO Report effectively uses the generic term *Enabling Environments*. Similar easily understood and positive terms should be used rather than popular terms that change over time. Accessibility requires appropriate rather than universal responses.

Statistics are a significant aspect in the Report – and the estimated 15% of the world’s population with a disabling condition represents 1 billion people worldwide.

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However with ageing populations, continuing conflicts and advances in medical science – it should be remembered that 15% is effectively a ‘snapshot’ at a particular time. In reality the statistic could be 100% – as we will almost all experience temporary or permanent disabilities and limited mobility due to ageing and accidents, and we all become involved when a family member has a disability.

Accordingly more equitable and accessible environments and services benefit everyone.

In Australia this is no time for complacency. We are all aware of the recent OECD report that ranks Australia 21st out of 29 countries in employment participation rates for people with a disability – with 45% living near or below the poverty line.

We have also been advised at this Symposium that an estimated 37% of Indigenous Australians have a disability compared to the national statistic of 19%.

Current access initiatives and programs including the University of Sydney

In Australia there are many recent good examples of more accessible information, transportation, public domains and built environments. These examples and programs are mainly in urban areas – where 80% of Australian live. We need to better understand accessibility needs in rural and remote areas – and particularly Indigenous communities – to develop appropriate responses to a range of needs.

Through Access Australia I have been involved in a range of strategic programs – including access strategies for the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the University of Sydney. In 1997 we assisted UTS in developing the DDA Action Plan (DAP) and have provided ongoing reviews to provide UTS with current access information and best practice criteria.

During the past 3 years, UWS and more recently the University of Sydney engaged Access Australia to carry out a comprehensive access strategy involving assessments and prioritised recommendations for all public domain / Campus areas and all habitable buildings and areas. The recommendations are consistent with the APS and BCA 2011.

The University of Sydney access program particularly assessed the interface between heritage and access – due to extensive and significant heritage fabric. Costings are now being prepared for all priority 1 recommendations – with planned implementation over the next 5± years, as part of a major University infrastructure works program. The University program includes involvement of the Disability Consultative Committee (DCC) – and requires continuing involvement of all stakeholders, including students and staff with a disability.

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I commend the University of Sydney for this initiative – and trust that the access upgrade recommendations can be carried out in a consistent, effective and speedy manner so that we can all benefit from this real environmental change. Adequate funding is critical for realisation of this University access program.

Similar and related programs are in progress through many government agencies, community and corporate organisations – and these programs benefit from active involvement of effective Access Committees at local government level.

Accessibility is a key component in creating and maintaining more equitable outcomes for everyone.

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