Telecommunications Use by Women with Disabilities in remote, rural and regional Australia

Final report of a Pilot Telecommunications Survey conducted by Women With Disabilities Australia, April 2001

by Sue Salthouse for Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)
Acknowledgments

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) thanks all the respondents to this survey, who gave their time to complete the questionnaire and to make such insightful comments.

Thanks go also to the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) for their support. In 2000/2001, the Consumer Representation of WWDA in Relation to Telecommunications Issues has been supported by the Commonwealth through the ‘Grants to Fund Telecommunications Consumer Representations’ program of DCITA. This survey has been conducted under the Grants program.

The investigation undertaken in this survey, has given WWDA greater insight into Telecommunications Issues faced by its remote, rural and regionally located members. Information gathered through the survey has enabled WWDA to better represent its constituents.

The DCITA grant has also enabled WWDA to represent women with disabilities on a number of telecommunications bodies. In 2000/2001 these have been:

- the Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF);
- the ACIF Disability Advisory Board;
- the *Telecommunications, Disability and Consumer Representation Project* (administered by Blind Citizens Australia);
- the Telstra Disability Forum; and
- the Telstra Disability Equipment Program Consumer Advisory Group.

The grant has also enabled WWDA representatives to have input to the Telstra Consumer Consultative Council forums\(^1\).

Special thanks go to the other members of the WWDA ‘Telecommunications Consumer Representations’ Group, (Margaret Cooper, Vanessa Cini, Joyce Deering, and Christine Tilley) who helped design the questionnaire and gave valuable advice at every step of the investigation.

Sue Salthouse

*Member,*

WWDA ‘Telecommunications Consumer Representations’ Group

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\(^1\) With apologies to those who prefer the latinised plural “fora”.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This survey was initiated to assist Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) to better represent its remote, rural and regional members on matters of telecommunications.

2. Support for conducting the survey came from the Commonwealth, through the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) under its ‘Grants to Fund Telecommunications Consumer Representations’ program. A grant from this program, enables WWDA to be represented on a number of telecommunications bodies, and through this to be able to present its perspective on Telecommunications Issues.

3. The survey was conducted in April 2001, and 114 remote, rural, and regionally located members were surveyed. Perth and Darwin members were also included in the survey because of their geographical isolation. A total of 134 surveys were distributed. Thirty-four replies were received.

4. The small size of the sample means that only a general picture can be drawn from the responses. Fifty percent of the respondents actually live in regional centres with a population of 3000 or more. Regional Australia, according to the Telecommunications Service Inquiry conducted in 2000\(^2\) has reasonable access to telecommunications services. However, the perception of our regional respondents, along with those in remote and rural areas, is that access to telecommunications is costly, unreliable, and fraught with service difficulties.

5. The majority of survey respondents had limited mobility (though the causes were diverse) and used a mobility device of some kind (though, once again, there was a range of different types used).

6. On the whole, respondents were not experiencing difficulties in accessing a standard phone, although a range of adaptive technology was being used to enable its use. For those respondents using the Internet, a range of adaptive technology was also in use. However, there were a number of respondents (22 or 65%) who had little or no knowledge of what telecommunications products and services were available to them. Adaptive equipment itself was mainly supplied through the Telstra Disability Equipment Program, with some assistance coming from Commonwealth, State, local agencies or charitable organisations.

7. Furthermore, in remote and rural areas, finding out about general telecommunications and computer equipment available can be difficult, as regional centres may not carry a large range, and prices may be less competitive than in the cities. Finding out about adaptive technology is even more logistically difficult. Moreover, sales people, technicians, and telecommunications carrier personnel, are all perceived to be lacking in empathy, knowledge of equipment, knowledge of disability, and be disinterested in problem-solving for customers with disabilities.

8. The cost of acquiring equipment was seen as a major impediment to accessing telecommunications, but this was not particularly attributed to being associated with geographic location.

\(^2\) ‘Connecting Australia’ Report of the Telecommunications Service Inquiry, MA Besley September 2000
9. The main purpose of the survey was to ‘tease out’ the additional costs of telecommunications for women with disabilities due to location. However, the number of responses was extremely small, and respondents were unable to isolate these costs themselves. This is not inconsistent with results in other studies.

10. In any questions about barriers to access to telecommunications, costs figured most prominently as the main restricting factor. This is consistent with responses from WWDA’s more general Telecommunications survey conducted in 1999\(^3\).

11. Twenty-seven (79%) of respondents were Internet users, most of them being frequent users, accessing it both at home and at work. For those without the Internet at home, cost was the factor preventing the acquisition of necessary equipment. Most users had had outside help (formal training, work, friends/family) to get started in using the Internet, but had built on that base with further self-teaching. For the respondents who were not currently Internet users, cost again loomed as the barrier to its use.

12. As for the previous WWDA telecommunications survey, Internet uses were multiple (3.3 responses per respondent) with e-mail contact, research and e-commerce ranking similarly, and comprising 65% of responses. E-mail, ‘chat room’, newsgroups and discussion groups together comprised 39% of responses, highlighting the value of the Internet for reducing isolation.

13. When specifically asked about the importance of the Internet, 48% nominated alleviation of isolation as its most significant value.

14. Again, respondents were generally unable to isolate the degree to which their disability was restricting access to the Internet. Instead, cost was nominated as the major barrier to access. Technical difficulties (such as slow connection time, slow download time, limited ISP choice) were nominated by all respondents (17) who answered the question about the affect of location on access to the Internet.

15. Despite that fact that, given sufficient funds, respondents wanted to be able to access the Internet at home, they had many suggestions on locations for community-based access points - libraries, church halls, neighbourhood houses, community halls. They also suggested business/community partnerships to fund such initiatives.

16. Respondents’ most pressing desire was for lobbying for effective concessions to be found to eliminate the cost barrier to accessing telecommunications.

17. The rationale for WWDA to pursue this desire is to be found in the words of Recommendation 14 of the Telecommunications Service Inquiry:

‘That funding for representation of consumers be extended beyond the current budget allocation, and consideration given to providing funding on a longer term basis than the existing annual cycle to ensure greater stability for consumer organisations. Provisions should also be made for additional resources to assist people with disabilities (to) participate in industry processes and conduct awareness raising activities.’

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INTRODUCTION

This study was initiated because of a high level of dissatisfaction with telecommunications services registered to the executive of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) by its remote, rural and regionally located members.

In addition, in the past several years there has been much public discussion about the inequities of delivery of telecommunications services to remote and rural areas throughout Australia. Although government initiatives were (and are) being put in place to address the inequities of telecommunications services delivery, WWDA felt that it was important to try to ‘tease out’ the additional difficulties and expenses which its remote, rural, and regionally located members encounter specifically because of their disability.

In 1999, Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) undertook a survey of women with disabilities in Australia to investigate all aspects of their use of telecommunications (including the Internet) and to identify barriers affecting their optimum access to telecommunications. The final report of this investigation was published in May 1999 ‘Telecommunications and Women with Disabilities’.

In many parts of this survey, women with disabilities indicated that cost was restricting access to their purchase of telecommunications services and equipment. This was particularly evident in their responses to questions about access to the Internet. ‘Cost’ was restricting access to the purchase of hardware, to the maintenance of that hardware, to the cost of subscribing to an Internet service provider (ISP), to the cost of connection calls, and finally, to the necessary training to enable them to use the facility.

Women with disabilities are amongst the most economically and socially disadvantaged of all groups in society, so that it is hardly surprising that financial barriers restricting access to telecommunications, including the Internet, should figure prominently. However for women with disabilities, all costs associated with accessing the Internet can be higher than for their counterparts in other low socio-economic groups.

The cost of purchasing hardware can be higher because adaptive technology may also need to be purchased (this can range from the relatively low add-on cost of an ergonomic keyboard, to the high cost of screen reader software). Internet connection costs can be higher for women with disabilities, because their disability/ies may make all aspects of working with the computer a longer, slower exercise - typing “url’s”, navigating the web, and assimilating information can all be lengthier operations. In addition, getting to training courses can present logistical difficulties, and once there, particular impairments may make acquiring new skills more difficult. Many women with disabilities report that they take much longer than other class members to learn computing and Internet skills.

It can be argued that women with disabilities have a “need” to access the Internet which is inversely proportional to their inability to afford it! In WWDA’s May 1999 survey, women with disabilities reported that isolation was a debilitating factor in their lives. Some women who were city dwellers, also ticked the ‘remote’ box on a

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4 Information about WWDA is included as Appendix A
5 ‘Telecommunications and Women with Disabilities’ Final report of the Telecommunications Survey conducted by WWDA, May 1999
question about place of living, thereby indirectly indicating the degree of isolation they felt. In that survey, the average number of disabilities per respondent was two. The second disability often cited was ‘depression’ associated with the restrictions and isolation enforced by the primary disability.

Telecommunications, and the Internet in particular, offer a way of overcoming this enforced isolation, and can be instrumental in alleviating the depression associated with isolation.

**Digital Divide**

Over the past several years, the term ‘Digital Divide’ has gained currency, to indicate the widening gap between those who are able to afford to access the Internet (and take advantage of all that it offers), and those who are economically precluded from its access. More and more services (eg. banks, airlines, e-commerce) offer concessions on business conducted via the Internet. It is ironic that those who are economically disadvantaged are denied these concessions.

**Remote, Rural and Regional**

In Australia, a second ‘Digital Divide’ operates which also makes access to the Internet inequitable for a number of Australians. This is a geographic divide, where those who live in remote and rural areas, to date, have had more costly, and less reliable telecommunications services.

In 2000, the Commonwealth government commissioned an independent Telecommunications Service Inquiry. The full report of this Inquiry can be viewed on the DCITA website at [http://www.dcita.gov.au](http://www.dcita.gov.au). The report (p.165) itself summarises the situation with respect to the geographic divide:

*The Inquiry has concluded that Australians generally have adequate access to a range of high quality, basic and advanced telecommunications services comparable to the leading information economies in the world. The Inquiry research indicates Australians who live in metropolitan and regional centres enjoy good telecommunication services and are generally satisfied with them. However, a significant proportion of those who live and work in rural and remote Australia have concerns regarding key aspects of services which, at this stage, are not adequate. Their concerns relate primarily to*

- the timely installation, repair and reliability of basic telephone services;
- mobile phone coverage at affordable prices; and
- reliable access to the Internet and data speeds generally.

*The Inquiry’s analysis suggests that the continued development of competition throughout Australia, combined with key government initiatives (such as Universal Service Obligation contestability) will have a positive effect on services over the next few years. These developments are likely to materially improve the services available to rural and remote consumers.*

*The recommendations which follow……………*

The Report also notes (p.163) “Analysis undertaken so far suggests that the telecommunications sector is making significant strides in bringing new and innovative

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6 “Connecting Australia”, report of the Telecommunications Service Inquiry, MA Besley, September 2000
Indeed, during 2000 and 2001, a number of changes have occurred, or are being initiated, which begin to address the inequities of the geographic Digital Divide.

Amongst these changes are⁷:

(i) Internet Service Provider (ISP) Local Call Costs

In 2001, Telstra launched BigPond Home which will extend Internet access to anyone in Australia for the cost of a local call. It is being introduced progressively. A Telstra wholesale product enables other ISP’s to offer similar local call access.

(ii.) Local Call Zone Review

Telstra is progressively introducing Local Call Zone changes whereby in rural areas, local calls charges are extended to operate beyond the ‘within regional centre’ to within an entire zone.

(iii.) Improved Reliability of Internet Access for all

The Telecommunications Services Inquiry found that a small but significant number of customers, particularly in remote/rural areas were either unable to access Internet over the phone line or had slow Internet speeds. A joint Government-Telstra initiative has begun to achieve 19.2 kilobytes per second (or equivalent) as a minimum delivery speed throughout Australia.

(iv.) Other initiatives

Amongst other Government directives to telecommunications carriers are to:- reduce fault repair times; reduce line installment times; improve emergency temporary service installations; improve services to indigenous communities (especially for reliable payphone access); improve mobile telephone service coverage; improve public Internet service access (many projects are through the Networking the Nation grants program); strengthen the priority phone repair services to people with health and emergency needs; and improve remote and rural access to telecommunications in the education and health sectors.

Survey Rationale and Design

Women with disabilities who live in remote/rural/regional and regional areas of Australia, are faced with these two ‘Digital Divides’ which create a huge barrier to accessing tele-communications services, and in particular the Internet, ie. the social and economic circumstances with which they cope because of their disability/ies (an economic digital divide), and the more costly, less reliable telecommunications services they receive due to their location (a geographic digital divide).

Government, through regulations and directives to telecommunications carriers, has initiatives in place to address the latter inequities.

Thus, it was decided to survey women with disabilities in remote, rural and regional locations, to ascertain the degree to which location exacerbates the costs associated with disability/ies in getting good access to telecommunications. For instance,
getting to a centre to view different computer systems can be more difficult; getting information about adaptive technology available can be more difficult; getting to a centre to view items available on the Telstra Disability Equipment Program is more difficult; accessing training courses is more difficult, etc.

It was hoped that this pilot study would indicate the degree to which telecommunication costs are higher for women with disabilities in remote, rural and regional locations.

The survey was designed by the members of the WWDA Telecommunications Consumer Representation Group. It was trialled with two members, one living in a rural area and one in a remote area. In addition, the survey was trialled by two members living in Canberra. Using this feedback, final alterations were made to the survey.

Following this, the survey was sent to 114 WWDA members living in remote, rural and regional areas of Australia as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No. of Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q’LD</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the numbers in WA and NT were so low, it was decided to include city members in both those states. This increased the number sent to the NT by 12 and to WA by 8, making a total of 134 surveys distributed. Anecdotal evidence about cost and reliability of service, from members in these cities in part justifies their inclusion. No attempt was made to make the distribution proportionate to the population in each state/territory.

A Reply Paid service was set up for return of surveys, and thirty-four surveys were received (a return rate of 25%). Working with such a small sample size has meant that no statistically significant conclusions can be drawn from this study. All quotes of percentage figures in discussion of data are only included to assist with visualising the trends in results.

A copy of the survey is included as Appendix B.

An analysis of those surveys received follows.
SECTION 1: LOCATION & DISABILITY

Q.1. Where do you live?

All non-urban individual members of WWDA were selected by postcode from the membership database. [An Australia-wide list of non-urban postcodes was obtained from Australia Post.] A total of 134 members were selected, and the surveys were posted in the first week of April 2001. A reply paid service was set up with Australia Post to enable members to return the surveys free of charge.

The return date for the surveys was Monday 30 April 2001. [However, replies continued to be received during the first two weeks of May.]

Size of Township

The majority of respondents live in a regional centre, ie. a town with a population of 3000 or more. Only 4 of the respondents (12%) lived in a ‘remote’ area, ie. a farm outside town. Ten respondents commented on the affect of their ‘remoteness’, and these responses were from residents in all town/farm categories.

Comments on Remoteness

- Public transport available, but:
  costly, and the respondent was self-conscious about “appearing a fool” in front of others,
  access to Internet/fax at library limited, fax from PO is expensive.

- No public transport available, but:
  taxi costs to nearby town (approx. 3000 population, 18 km distance) costs 2 x $20.
Nothing available past farm gate; taxi costs to nearby town (approx. 1000 population) costs 2 x $40, 
family provide transport, 
rely on family/friends for transport 
no bus or wheelchair taxi available.

- Restricted to travel by ambulance stretcher, so recreational visits to town are not possible,
- Transport difficulties 
  but mobile phone, home phone and Internet reduce isolation,
  155 km from regional centre along hazardous road, isolated in winter,
- No transport difficulties
- Cost = $150 - $180 per month, for ph/fax/IN access (Alice Springs)

Q.1. Respondents by State

Q.2. In what age range are you?

Because of the small sample size, there is no significant difference in the number of correspondents in any category. [Of the six respondents who do not use the Internet, all were aged 41 or more, and three were older than 60 years. Thus there were 28 respondents, across all age categories, who were users of the Internet.] A chart showing the age range of respondents follows.

Q.3. Description of Disability

In response to this question, nearly all respondents gave a physical or medical description of their disability, and added a comment on its affect on their quality of life. For many, the affect of their disability was to limit mobility in some way (13 responses); for some the affect was chronic pain (4 responses); that they coped with multiple disabilities (7), or that the primary affect of their disability was extreme fatigue (5).
Interestingly, in Question 3, only one respondent specifically noted ‘emotional or psychiatric condition which makes me vulnerable to feelings of anxiety’ as a disability or an affect of her primary disability. In the WWDA telecommunications survey of May 1999, 25% of respondents had nominated ‘emotional or psychiatric condition which makes me vulnerable to stress’ as one of their disabilities.

More graphic comments were that the disability was:

‘chronically painful’
‘aggravating’
‘bloody awful - you asked’,

and indeed, we had.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Description</th>
<th>Specific Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited Mobility</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paralysis Related</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congenital Condition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degenerative Disease</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairment</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquired Brain Injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q.4. What is the affect of your disability?

The majority of respondents used a mobility device. In fact, there were thirty-three responses in this category, including seven who used wheelchairs, and one each using a guide dog or cane.

Hand-use restrictions accounted for 10 responses.

Respondents also noted that fatigue affected their ability to learn new skills.

As found in other surveys of women with disabilities\(^8\), there was an average of two affects noted per respondent.

It is interesting to note that, in this survey, only 7% of responses nominated a secondary emotional/psychiatric affect of their disability. In WWDA's previous telecommunications survey, this secondary affect was nearly double that found in the current survey.

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**Q.4 Affect of Disability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affect (see Key)</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**

A = Use of Mobility Device  
B = Hand use restriction  
C = Hearing Loss  
D = Speech Impairment  
E = Sight Impairment  
F = Learning Difficulties  
G = Emotional/psychiatric condition  
H = Other

Q.5. Are you experiencing any problems in accessing a standard telephone service from your home?

Seventy-eight percent of respondents did not experience difficulty in accessing the standard telephone service from their homes. Of the five respondents who reported experiencing difficulties, most related to personal difficulties with using the phone, rather than difficulties with the telephone line/service itself. The only service difficulty reported was the susceptibility of a landline to malfunction at times of heavy rains. There was one ‘nil response’ to this question.

The difficulties experienced with using the standard telephone were:

- Need for a handsfree speaker phone for teleconferencing,
- Inaccessible location of a wall phone,
- Fatigue in holding a handset, and
- Poor coordination for dialling and holding phone.

![Q.5 Problems in Accessing Standard Phone](image-url)
SECTION 2: ADAPTIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

Q.6. What specialised/adaptive telecommunications equipment do you use?

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) did not use any specialised/adaptive telecommunications equipment. Another 3 respondents did not respond to this question.9

Of the remaining 15 respondents, the responses could be broadly divided into two categories (although naturally this division is not definitive):

- adaptive technology for the standard phone, and
- adaptive technology for the computer.

**Adaptive technology for the Standard Phone**

Equipment pieces used by women with hearing impairment were:

- Volume Control Phone (2)
- Extension Bell (1)
- TTY Phone (2)
- Flashing Light Phone (1)

One respondent, the Disability Advocate for the Riverland Region in South Australia, commented that: ‘TTY’s need repair in Adelaide, which is a problem.’

Equipment pieces used by women with hand use restriction were:

- Telephone Headset (1)
- Handsfree Phone (1)
- Large Button Phone (1)

In addition, a mobile phone was used as a security device by a woman with physical disability. Similarly, a cordless phone was cited as essential for a respondent who found it difficult to reach the fixed phone. Lack of access to public telephones was once again cited as a difficulty.

**Adaptive technology for the Computer**

Equipment in use was:

- Speech Recognition Software (2)
- Screen Reader Software (1)
- Ergonomic Keyboard (1)
- Large VDU Screen (1)
- Laptop Computer (1)
- Mousepad Cushion (1)

9 Unfortunately, this highlights a design fault of the survey. Having answered ‘No’ to Question 6., Questions 9-14 became redundant, and there should have been a branch at this point.
One respondent wanted to use a speech recognition program, and another to use a screen reader program, but neither was able to afford purchase of the appropriate software.

**Q.7. What knowledge do you have of company products and services available for people with disabilities and/or older people?**

In general, it could be said that there was a general lack of knowledge about the services and products available. No research has been done comparing this lack of information available to remote/rural/regional dwellers compared to their city/urban counterparts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this lack of information is universal. However, opportunities for obtaining this information in the city are easier.

Under the Universal Service Obligation, Telstra is pro-active in endeavouring to disseminate information, and has a variety of mechanisms in place to do so. Despite this, many do not know where to go to obtain information, or whom they should ask to find out the best source/s of information in their area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of knowledge (see key)</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**

A = High level of knowledge  
B = Some knowledge  
C = No knowledge  
D = Learning More
The sources of information were various – Telstra (4), including information from their ‘Products & Services’ Catalogue; advertisements (4) [including junkmail !]; newspaper articles (1), Internet (1), a specific forum (1) and Consumer group (1).

Comments were also made that ‘no matter what information is available it is irrelevant if it is not affordable’. This contrasted with the comment that ‘there is too much confusing information available’.

Some respondents had a practical perspective on seeking out information.

‘Keep asking and don’t take NO for an answer.’
‘I seek out what information I need, when I need it.’
‘Ask contacts over the Internet, and research using the Internet.’

Q.8. From where was equipment supplied?

‘Nil Response’ and ‘Not Applicable’ accounted for 13 responses. Thus only 21 respondents noted from where their equipment was supplied. It can be seen from Table 2, that most equipment was supplied by, or available from, the telecommunications companies. In view of the degree to which “high cost” figured as an answer to so many of the questions, it is disappointing to see that 5 of the 21 (24%) women who noted the source of their equipment, had had to purchase it themselves. In addition, 5 (24%) women had registered a need for equipment, but had not had it supplied.

Once again, although the small sample size does not allow for any statistically significant conclusion to be drawn, the indication is that there is a great need for assistance in the supply of adaptive technology. Similarly, the survey was not designed to give any comparison to the situation for women with disabilities in city/urban environments.

Table 2: Sources of Equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State/C’wealth Agency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eg. PADP, CRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications Company</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mainly Telstra)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Organisation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funded</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of agencies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eg. State/Co./Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Variety Club, Family Gift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not supplied/not available</td>
<td>(5/1) 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Question 9, a ‘Nil Response’ was recorded for 22 surveys (see Footnote No.2.). At this point, these surveys were separated out, and the answers to Questions 9-14 analysed separately as Group A. Analysis of the responses for the remaining 12 surveys are given as Group B.
Q.9. What difficulties, if any, were encountered in obtaining the equipment?

Group A: ‘Nil Response’ recorded for 22 surveys.

Group B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs too high</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty getting to a centre to view equipment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty installing equipment supplied</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple difficulties, including access to the Disability Equipment Program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No training available</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consumers also encounter difficulties with fluctuating power supply, which affects the performance of standard equipment supplied, necessitating the installation of more robust (and usually more expensive) alternatives. The Disability Equipment Program/other programs do not take this into account.

Q.10. To what degree were the difficulties caused by your location?

Group A:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a lot</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difficulties noted were: ‘Transport to search and purchase the equipment (was difficult).’

‘(There is) no public transport. Therefore (I) had to wait until friends were available.’

Group B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a lot</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes respondents gave more than one response, so that the total number of responses is NOT equal to the number of respondents.
In general, equipment salespersons have no knowledge of how the equipment will perform in other than ideal conditions. Thus their advice has severe limitations when the equipment will be required in a situation of fluctuating power supply, poor quality phone reception, etc.

This difficulty is compounded where adaptive equipment is needed. There are no procedures to get equipment to remote/rural areas for trialling its suitability to the conditions or the person’s needs. Conversely, it is more difficult for the woman with a disability to get to a centre to view equipment, and this action still leaves the problem of whether it will function satisfactorily under non-ideal conditions.

Staff at country centres (or shopfronts) for telecommunications companies can be ignorant of disabilities. (However, this problem is not confined to country outlets.) This includes ignorance of:

- how to interact with the client with a disability,
- what equipment is available, or
- how it could be adapted to better suit specific needs.

Country centres often have higher retail costs compared to the city.

Once equipment is supplied, sometimes getting faults serviced is difficult, with no practical procedures in place and long delays experienced.

Moreover, the certification needed to prove eligibility for the Disability Equipment Program equipment can be difficult for country people. For one respondent a visit to the Ear, Nose and Throat specialist for authorisation for a volume control phone involved a round trip of 500 km, plus an overnight stay as well as the fee for consulting a specialist.

This experience brings to light a general need (in both city and country areas) for review of the procedures by which women with disabilities (and all people with disabilities) obtain authorisation to access the Disability Equipment Program.

Anecdotally, women with long-term disabilities relate that they have been asked to get reassessment when old equipment needs to be replaced. Safeguards against potential abuse of the Disability Equipment Program must be in place, and sometimes reassessment is requested to check whether needs have changed. However, reassessment is not always necessary.

In some instances, a practical approach as to who constitutes a suitable medical professional or specialist for verification of eligibility to the Disability Equipment Program, could save expensive excursions and consultations (such as that outlined above).

**Q.11. What was the monetary cost to you of obtaining the equipment?**

Only four respondents were able to nominate any equipment cost, with one of those only itemising the cost of an adaptive software program. The range of costs was large and of course, without any information about the type of computer system purchased, or location of purchase, no further comment can be made.
Group A:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not applicable</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer(^{11}) (2 responses)</td>
<td>(1) $2000   (2) $2990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nil Response</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer(^4)</td>
<td>$3450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAWS Program</td>
<td>$1500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.12. What amount of this cost was due to your location?
Insufficient responses were received for this question.

Group A:

| No Cost                  | 22 |

Group B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nil Response</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost not related to location</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>2  (1) Approx. $450, (2) A lot !</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.13. What additional specialised/adaptive telecommunications equipment would you like to access?

Group A:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nil response</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Something to help overcome fatigue with typing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax/Pager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{11}\) The computer costs cited were most likely the costs of the hardware purchase, rather that the cost of any adaptive equipment.
Group B:

A range of suggestions was made about adaptive equipment desired. Not all suggestions were realistic in that the equipment desired has not yet been invented (although this should not preclude the industry from taking up these ideas!).

- TTY phone needed at home and in public places.
- Cordless phones to be part of the Disability Equipment Program.
- Speech recognition software with integrated dictaphone.
- Something to speed up download of images, when computer-use relies on these.
- Phone integrated with the computer.

Q.14. What restricts your ability to access this equipment?

Once again, there are insufficient responses to draw any statistically valid information. However, to get some picture of the situation, the responses from Groups A & B (whilst eliminating the ‘Nil Responses’) can be combined to make a total of 17 responses. Of these, 9 (53%) are restrictions accorded to ‘cost’, and 4 (24%) are restrictions attributed to disability limitations.

In the tables, the ‘cost’ groupings are marked with (a), and the ‘disability limitation’ groupings with (b).

Group A:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nil Response</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge of software programs available</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of equipment/ISP/maintenance too great (a)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost, and the difficulty of getting to a centre to see what is available (a)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost (a)</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to retail centre</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy to research/buy/get concessions (b)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical limitations to using the equipment (b)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 3: USE OF THE INTERNET

Q.15. Do you use the Internet?

Question 15 was a ‘branching point’ of the survey. Twenty-eight (27) respondents replied in the affirmative, and six (6) in the negative. One respondent did not give any further responses.

Questions 16 to 20 applied only to these 6 respondents. Their replies constitute opinions, and are of no statistical significance.

SECTION 3(A): THOSE NOT USING THE INTERNET AT PRESENT

Q.16. What factors, if any, related to your disability, restrict your access to the Internet?

The responses given were not primarily related to disability, and included a ‘lack of interest’ (2), ‘age and slowness in learning new skills’ (1), and the ‘cost of purchasing/maintaining/running equipment’ (2).

Q.17. What factors, if any, related to your location, restrict your access to the Internet?

Once again cost was mentioned, but in response to this question more related to the cost of, and lack of choice with Internet Service Providers (2). Naturally, those who had no interest in the Internet, registered no location difficulty in accessing it (2). One respondent mentioned the limited availability of Internet access at the local library, and the transport difficulties in getting there.

Q.18. Do you know how to use the Internet but do not have access to it now?

Three respondents did know how to use the Internet, two had no knowledge of it.

Q.19. If you answered YES to Question 18, please explain the reason/s for you current lack of access.

Once again, the cost factor predominated. Two respondents could not afford to buy a computer and/or access the Internet on a Disability Support Pension, one respondent’s computer had insufficient capacity to run the Internet, and she could not afford to upgrade. There were three ‘Nil Response’ answers to this question.

12 ‘Nil Response’ = 1
The next question, Question 20., had alternative parts:

How did you learn to use the Internet?,

OR

How do you think you would get the necessary training to learn to use the Internet?

**Q.20. How did you learn to use the Internet?**

There were three respondents to this question - one had acquired the skills at work, one at a formal course at a local Learning Centre, and one at the local library.

**Q.20 (a) How do you think you would get the necessary training to learn to use the Internet?**

Of the three respondents to this question - one was aware of many available courses, one opted for self-teaching with plenty of access time, and the third had no interest in training.

This branch of the survey ended at Question 20, and the respondents proceeded to Question 26.

**SECTION 3(B): THOSE CURRENTLY USING THE INTERNET**

Once again, the statistical limitations of the survey must be noted. However, the responses give a general picture of use of the Internet by women with disabilities in remote, rural and regional areas.

In this section, the majority of respondents were frequent and competent users of the Internet.

**Q.21. How often do you use the Internet?**

Twenty-four out of the 27 respondents (89%) were frequent users of the Internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times per week</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q.22. Where do you use the Internet?**

There was a total of 44 responses, giving an average of 1.6 responses per respondent. As the responses ‘box’ shows, in most cases the Internet was used at home and at work. The ‘other’ response was use at a university.
Q.23. Are you satisfied with where you use the Internet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.23(a). If possible, give reasons for your answer.

Most respondents did not further qualify their answer to the first part of Question 23. Of those who did, the comments were distributed evenly between those who were satisfied, and those who were not.

Positive responses were:

'I am lucky to have the Internet at work and at home.'
'(I have) comfortable, accessible office facilities.'
'(I have a) home facility and expertise of family members.'
'(We had an) extra (phone) line put in, no problems.'
'Working from home suits (me and is) comfortable.'
'At home, you can take your own time.'

Negative responses were:

'It is good at work, but I would like it at home as well.'
'Too costly at home.'
'Slow access, (there are) general infrastructure inadequacies to rural areas.'
'Too rushed, and need more training at my place.'
'Library is always busy with other users.'
'Home set-up is good, but would like to be able to access a free community service.'
'Too slow, broadband access would be better. Download is slow, and drop-outs frequent…'

Q.24. How did you learn to use the Internet?

There were a total of 45 responses, giving an average of 1.7 responses per respondent. The response ‘box’ indicates that women had some outside help, and supplemented this by perseverance with self-teaching. In one case there was a progression from introductory learning with family & friends, to a formal course, leading to work using the Internet, to the degree of competence where the respondent could make a web page for her workplace.

| Friends/family | 10 | Self Taught | 18 |
| Formal training | 5  | Work       | 9  |
| School         | 1  | Other (specify below) | 2  |
| TOTAL          | 45 |            |    |
Of the two respondents in the ‘Other’ category, one had learnt at a WWDA training course under the ‘@ccessability Online Project’ funded by the National Office of Information Economy (DCITA) in 1999, and the second respondent had attended a local Learning Centre.

Q.25. What do you use the Internet for?

There were a total of 89 responses, giving an average of 3.3 responses per respondent. This is hardly surprising as the Internet is a multiple-use medium. It is interesting to note that E-mail contacts make up nearly one quarter of the responses, and highlights the value of the Internet in reducing isolation. Such a result would probably be universal, across both rural and urban areas, and for those with or without disability/ies. Naturally, further research is needed to investigate this assertion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail contacts</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Chat Room’ facilities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News groups</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion groups</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify below)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many respondents made comments about how they valued the Internet:

‘It has given me another world.’
‘Vital for education, studying post grad. in Business.’
‘Disability, accessibility, tourism facilities, and latest updates.’
‘Lifestyle information, leisure, travel.’
‘Music and news.’
‘Information, networking.’

In the ‘Other’ category, activities noted were:

‘(Providing) secretarial services for other groups.’
‘Browsing for information, writing letters.’
‘Looking for jobs.’
‘Phone directories.’
‘Keep in contact with current issues and legislation.’

This branch of the survey ended at Questions 25, and all respondents answered the remaining Questions 26-31.
Q.26. How does/would your disability affect your access to and/or use of the Internet?

Eighteen of the 38 responses were not countable, ie. ‘Nil Response’, ‘Not Applicable’, ‘Unknown’. Thus, of the remaining 20 responses, 15 (75%) said that costs (linked to their disability) affected their access to and/or use of the Internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable/Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost (including cost of adaptive technology)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of adaptive technology for a Macintosh computer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely on pictures, download time is high, so costs are high</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge on what to get</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too fatigued to look (for hardware)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is difficult as disability affects speed of learning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.27. How does/would your location affect your access to the Internet?

Seventeen of the 47 responses were not countable. Of the 30 remaining responses, ‘cost’, once again, accounted for 12 (40%) of responses. The remaining 18 (60%) were attributable to technical difficulties due to geographic location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable/Unknown/Not Sure</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost: ISP rates high</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD calls to log-on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second phone line exorbitant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical difficulties:</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow connection time (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow download time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited ISP choice and service poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landline gets water affected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.28. How would you rate the importance of the Internet to yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely important</th>
<th>Quite important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Not very Important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>Nil Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen that the categories ‘Extremely important’, ‘Quite important’ and ‘Moderately important’ account for the 27 respondents who do use the Internet at present.

Significantly, forty-eight percent of these respondents, said that a positive aspect of their Internet use was the alleviation of isolation. Other research has shown that this benefit is experienced by all people with disabilities who are somewhat isolated by virtue of their disability, regardless of their place of living. It could be that for remote/rural/regional women with disabilities, their isolation is exacerbated by their location.

Other positive comments from this group were that the Internet:

‘Allows me some control over my life.’
‘Opens up a new world.’
‘Improves (my) quality of life.’
‘Enabled me to study.’ (4 respondents)

‘Learning the Internet now, will help me as I age, and my disability worsens.’

However to keep things in perspective, one respondent noted that: ‘personal contact is still important.’

Q.29. What community-based solutions might be workable in your area to improve your access to telecommunications?

The suggestions given mostly related to making the Internet more available in public facilities, like libraries, neighbourhood houses, community halls and Internet cafes, with the proviso that the locations and the terminals themselves be accessible. Forty-one percent of respondents suggested that adaptive technology be available at these community sites. However, these solutions are only applicable in regional centres, as most small townships do not have suitable public facilities anyway.

Another suggestion was that communities work to nurture/support ISP’s which enable local call access to the Internet.

There is also an opening for ‘travelling trainers’ to cover rural areas to provide basic to advanced training in using the Internet.

The only suggestion about other telecommunications was with respect to the lack of availability of public phones for the Hearing Impaired. On public phones, TTY facilities need to be more widely available, and volume control technology needs to be improved.

Despite all these suggestions, for many women with disabilities, the actual travel to the point of access is the most restrictive factor. For them, community-based solutions are irrelevant.
Q.30. What solutions could be suggested to organisations/companies/government to improve your access to telecommunications?

There was a general feeling (53% of respondents) that some system of telecommunications concession for people with disabilities would be justifiable. Concessions for training courses were also suggested. As for Q.29, there was emphasis on having accessible computers, with adaptive equipment, available in public government facilities such as libraries.

In rural areas, sellers of telecommunications equipment have no knowledge of adaptive technology, and no knowledge of the requirements of various disabilities. There is a need to provide appropriate training.

Business/community partnerships could be developed to give assistance.

The government needs to ensure improvements in mobile phone coverage, telephone service, and equitable call costs.

Q.31. Are there any other telecommunications issues you would like WWDA to follow up?

There were 15 ‘Nil Response’ (44%) to this question. The remaining responses spread over a wide range of issues. Many of these were a reiteration of issues mentioned in response to other questions - lower costs/concessions for all telecommunications, high cost of extra phone lines, more accessible public Internet access (and transport to enable it), training, access to public phones, better digital mobile coverage, etc.

A query was raised about WWDA’s position on pornography on the Internet, and making women aware of preserving their safety in Internet relationships.

WWDA was asked to liaise with the Australian Communications Exchange to help with the improvement of its dissemination of information.

Lastly, WWDA was requested to help lobby for universal design of telecommunications equipment, to improve its useability for women with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The small sample size of this survey does not allow for any statistically significant analysis of results to be done. However, the responses have enabled a ‘snapshot’ of women with disabilities in remote/rural/regional locations to be taken. It gives an insight into their views about telecommunications services, and particularly Internet accessibility.

Unfortunately, respondents were not able to put a specific dollar figure on telecommunications costs which were directly attributable to their disability or location. Nevertheless, there was an underlying theme that all facets of their telecommunication costs were higher than those of their city/urban counterparts.

Similarly, there was a feeling that the cost of telecommunications is higher for people with disabilities, eg. from the extra call costs a wheelchair user incurs, in having to
phone prior to visiting any venue to check its physical accessibility - to the high cost of adaptive technology needed for screen reader software for the Vision Impaired.

The cost of telecommunications was a recurring theme. Many women with disabilities are on low income, yet more isolated by their disabilities and more reliant on telecommunications to connect them to the wider world.

Overcoming these obstacles will continue to be a crusade which WWDA will pursue through its representation on Telecommunications Advisory bodies at government, consumer, and corporate levels.

In the words of Recommendation 14 of the Telecommunications Service Inquiry:

‘That funding for representation of consumers be extended beyond the current budget allocation, and consideration given to providing funding on a longer term basis than the existing annual cycle to ensure greater stability for consumer organisations. Provisions should also be made for additional resources to assist people with disabilities (to) participate in industry processes and conduct awareness raising activities.’
APPENDIX A - About Women With Disabilities Australia

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the peak organisation for women with disabilities in Australia. It is a federating body of individuals and networks in each State and Territory of Australia and is made up of women with disabilities and associated organisations. WWDA is a woman centred organisation which works on a collective model. This means the decisions are made using a consensus approach. The national secretariat is located in Tasmania. WWDA is run by women with disabilities, for women with disabilities. It is the only organisation of its kind in Australia and one of only a very small number internationally. WWDA is inclusive and does not discriminate against any disability.

WWDA seeks to ensure opportunities in all walks of life for all women with disabilities. In this it aims to increase awareness of, and address issues faced by, women with disabilities in the community. It links women with disabilities from around Australia, providing opportunities to identify and discuss issues of common concern. The objectives of the organisations include:

• To develop a network of women with disabilities throughout Australia to work together for mutual benefit;
• To advocate for every women with a disability to have the opportunity for true involvement in all levels of society;
• To develop leadership and the sharing of responsibilities to enable women with disabilities to take their place in whatever section of society they choose;
• To change social attitudes, practices, and power relationships which discriminate against women with disabilities;
• To lobby for the implementation of procedures and enactment of legislation which will advance and benefit all women with disabilities and combat sexism;
• To inform and educate the public with a view to advancing the opportunities for women in the political, creative, civil and social fields.

The organisation is managed by a National Executive Committee, which is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting. Each State and Territory of Australia is represented on the National Executive Committee. All programs and activities conducted by WWDA are in direct response to the identified issues and concerns of women with disabilities in Australia. It is at the forefront of advocacy with, and on behalf of, women with disabilities in Australia.

WWDA’s major policy and program areas include: violence against women with disabilities. Improving access to telecommunications (including information technologies), unlawful sterilisation of girls and women with disabilities. Leadership and mentoring; housing, ageing. Health; links with the women’s movement, organisations development; development of State Territory and Regional WWDA groups; and systemic advocacy.

WWDA is currently funded on an annual basis under the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services Disability Programs Research and Development Grants.
Dear WWDA Member,

Attached is a pilot, survey on telecommunications. It is being sent to rural and regional members of WWDA. We are trying to get an idea of the extent to which your disability/ies, combined with the difficulties of your location, affect your access to, and use of telecommunications.

WWDA is the recipient of a small grant from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), to enable us to represent women with disabilities on a number of telecommunications consumer forums (both private, and government).

The group of representatives comprises Vanessa Cini [Australian Communications Industry Forum, and Disability Advisory Board]; Margaret Cooper [Telecommunications and Disability Representation Project (TEDICORE)]; Joyce Deering [a member of the former Telstra regional Consumer Consultative Council for the NT, and now WWDA’s contact on general telecommunications matters in the NT]; Sue Salthouse [Telstra Disability Forum and Telstra Disability Equipment Program Consumer Advisory Group]; and Christine Tilley [lecturer and researcher into telecommunications and disability at Queensland University of Technology].

WWDA conducted a general telecommunications survey of all members in 1999. Currently, the delivery of equitable telecommunications services to rural areas is of concern to rural people, policy and lawmakers, and thus to government. A number of enquiries are being conducted in this area.

However WWDA believes no information is being sought about the additional complications and costs which you encounter in accessing telecommunications when you live outside an urban area and also have disability/ies. We hope that this pilot survey will help our telecommunications representatives better represent you.

Your name has been selected at random by postcode from the WWDA mailing list. We would appreciate your taking the time to complete the survey and return it to us by Monday, 30 April.

If you require a large print format, or need to have the survey read to you, please contact me on Ph: 02 6291 6842, so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Salthouse

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With apologies to those who prefer the latin plural “fora”
Telecommunications and Disability - “How’s the Bush Telegraph working for you?”
A pilot survey of WWDA Rural Members
(For any enquiries or clarification about this survey, please contact Sue Salthouse on Ph: 02 6291 6842.)

Wherever possible, please try to put down your telecommunication costs, eg. line connection costs, call costs, Internet costs.

1. Where do you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional centre (population 3000 +)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural township (population 1000 - 3000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small township (population less than 1000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote (eg. Farm outside town)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give details about your “remoteness”

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. In what age range are you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 and over</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How would you describe your disability?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

4. What is the effect of your disability?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use mobility device eg. wheelchair, walker, guide dog, cane, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand use restriction causing difficulty using mouse, keyboards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/psychiatric condition which makes me vulnerable to feelings of anxiety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Did you experience/are you experiencing any problems in accessing a standard telephone service from your home?

6. What specialised/adaptive telecommunications equipment do you use? For example, you may use TTY, the National Relay Service or a large button phone. (Please include equipment used to access the Internet, eg. large screen, voice recognition software)

7. What knowledge do you have of company products and services available for older people and/or people with disabilities? For example, Telstra Products and Services Catalogue

8. From where was the equipment supplied?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Tick</th>
<th>Give Name of Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Government Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications company</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not supplied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. What difficulties, if any, were encountered in obtaining the equipment?
10. To what degree were the difficulties caused by your location?
(Please circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Not a lot</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If there were difficulties, please give details.

11. What was the monetary cost to you of obtaining the equipment?

$ ................

12. What amount of this cost was due to your location?

$ ................

13. What additional specialised/adaptive telecommunications equipment would you like to access?

14. What restricts your ability to access this equipment?

15. Do you use the Internet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Go direct to Question 21

Continue to next question

16. What factor/s, if any, related to your disability, restrict your access to the Internet?
17. What factor/s, if any, related to your location, restrict your access to the Internet?

18. Do you know how to use the Internet but do not have access to it now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

19. If you answered YES to Question 16, please explain the reason/s for your current lack of access?

20. How did you learn to use the Internet?

20(a). How do you think you would get the necessary training to learn to use the Internet?

Go direct to Q.26

21. How often do you use the Internet?

| Daily | Few times per week | Weekly | Monthly | Occasionally |

22. Where do you use the Internet?

| Home | Library | Work | Community facility | Friends | Other (specify over page) | At a family member’s |
23. Are you satisfied with where you use the Internet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

24. How did you learn to use the Internet?

- Friends/family
- Formal training
- School
- Self Taught
- Work
- Other (specify below)

25. What do you use the Internet for?

- E-mail contacts
- ‘Chat Room’ facilities
- News groups
- Discussion groups
- Shopping
- Banking
- Research
- Entertainment
- Other (specify below)

26. How does your location affect your access to the Internet?

(eg. Cost of connection to an Internet Service Provider; call cost, slow connection time, etc)

27. How would you rate the importance of the Internet for yourself?
(Please circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
<th>Quite important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If possible, please explain the reason for the importance rating you give.

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

28. What community based solutions might be workable in your area to improve your access to telecommunications?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

29. What solutions could be suggested to organisations/companies/government to improve your access to telecommunications?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

30. Are there any other telecommunications issues you would like WWDA to follow up?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Many thanks for taking the time to answer this survey. An executive summary of the results will be published in WWDAnews in due course. A hard copy of the full report will be available for purchase from WWDA, and will be available online on the WWDA website at www.wwda.org.au.