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Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Contact officer: Jason Harris
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Dear Mr Harris

2010-11 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Please find attached Access Innovation Media's pre-budget submission.

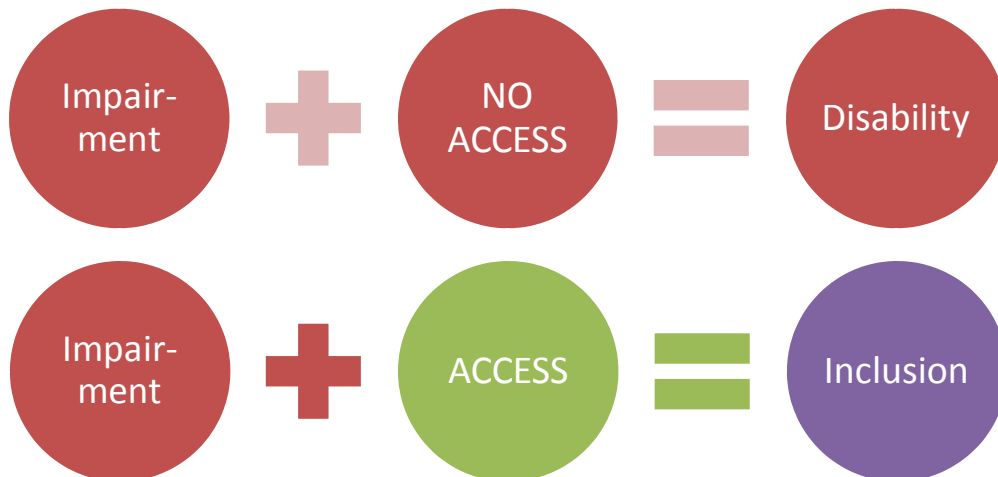
Yours sincerely

Tony Abrahams
Chief Executive

Access Innovation Media

Access Innovation Media (Ai-Media) is a social enterprise founded in 2003 dedicated to realising a big vision: The End of Disability. We develop and deliver innovative **access solutions** that deliver **inclusion** for people with impairment. Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1 – Our Vision: The End of Disability



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Impairment is a fact of life. Disability is not. Many submissions to the *Shut Out* report¹ noted that society disables far more than physical impairments do. It is community understanding of the nexus between impairment, disability, access and inclusion that is the key to transforming the impact of disability; and unlocking the productive capability of this lost sector of the economy.

Until we live in a society that is structured to support everyone's relatedness, many people with impairment will continue to endure basic human rights violations every day, while Australian taxpayers will continue to suffer under the ever-increasing burden of transfer payments to growing numbers of people excluded from full economic participation by reason of disability. According to Access Economics the **costs of excluding** people from the productive economy because of deafness alone exceed **\$12 billion per annum**.²

Ai-Media's mission is to be world leaders at developing and delivering innovative economic access solutions that transform the experience of life for people with impairment, their families and carers; and the community at large.

In 2004 we pioneered the large-scale introduction of captioning to Pay TV in Australia, with a cost-effective and common-sense approach that has seen the captioned library grow to deliver over 120,000 hours of programming across more than 45 channels annually. This total is set to grow further over coming years.

In 2007 we introduced live captioning to the classroom. Over the last 3 years we have refined this solution (known as Ai-Live™) with support from the NSW Department of Education, Media Access Australia, Telstra, the Australian Social Innovation Exchange

(ASIX), the Centre for Social Impact, and community groups including Aussie Deaf Kids, the Deafness Forum of Australia and many interested parents and teachers.

A world-first, Ai-Live™ provides realtime text of classroom discussion delivered to a student's laptop in under 7 seconds. Ai-Skills™ provides training, accreditation and quality assurance supporting the respeaking and subject matter skills central to the delivery of effective access. Further discussion of the Ai-Live™ solution can be found in the Hansard records of testimony given to the Senate Standing Committee on Hearing Health last month.³

Shut Out notes that while there is no way to measure the exact social and economic cost of failing to ensure young people with disabilities have every opportunity to learn, it is certain that failing to provide them with education limits their potential to lead productive, independent adult lives.⁴ Deaf children are 2.4 times less likely to complete high school than their hearing counterparts and 160,000 people are out of work and many of these are on the Disability Support Pension because we don't have a system that facilitates their inclusion in the workplace.⁵

Ai-Live™ is a solution designed for a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) model – giving individuals the choice of where, when and how captioning should best be deployed to deliver most effective access to education. Ai-Live™ builds on the National Broadband Network to remotely deliver live captioning services across metropolitan and regional Australia. We note that the Productivity Commission has commenced an 18-month inquiry into the feasibility of an NDIS on the back of strong recommendations from community⁶, business⁷ and government⁸.

The reality is that getting it right will take time; and experience. False starts and missteps are certain – but so is progress. One thing is clear; to be effective, we must start now.

Ai-Media recommends that the Government make a flexible, yet modest, provision in the 2010-11 Budget to trial innovative national solutions to previously intractable problems in the area of disability, with the aim of learning from these and informing the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Disability reform. Non-financial outcomes that focus on closing the gap and delivering access and inclusion must be linked to resource inputs in any reporting and evaluation mechanism.

As the Deputy Prime Minister noted, last night, in her release of the Government's Social Inclusion Strategy, "[i]t is about recognising the impact that disadvantage has on the lives and the life chances of so many Australians... But even more than changing the way government works, social inclusion is about learning to mobilise our whole community. To harness the potential of new technology for social benefit."⁹

Peter Shergold noted, in May 2009, that "most human services are under-resourced and the capacity of self-direction to build a more participatory, socially inclusive society will be constrained by the funded services available. People need not only a real voice in shaping the government services they want but sufficient money to back it up."¹⁰

Advances in technology – and business innovation – have enabled access solutions to be delivered that were not technically possible or economically feasible last year.

Can Australia's government rise to the challenge of funding solutions as quickly as they become available? A mechanism for doing so should be included in the Federal Budget.

Creating economic incentives to deliver social innovation is the best way to begin to tackle the generational imperative of reducing the costs of social exclusion – while building a broader and stronger revenue base into the future.

The modest costs of acting must be compared with the overwhelming costs of continued inaction.

“Achieving this vision means tackling the most entrenched forms of disadvantage in Australia today, expanding the range of opportunities available to everyone and strengthening resilience and responsibility.”¹¹

It is time for action.

¹ Commonwealth of Australia (2009) *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia*.

² Access Economics (2006) *Listen Hear – The Economic Impact and Cost of hearing loss in Australia*.

³ T. Abrahams, Testimony to Senate Standing Committee on Hearing Health, 7 December 2009. Hansard <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S12648.pdf>

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia (2009) *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia*.

⁵ Access Economics (2006) *Listen Hear – The Economic Impact and Cost of hearing loss in Australia*.

⁶ See www.NDIS.org.au for a list of supporting organisations – including National Disability Services.

⁷ Disability Investment Group (2009) *The Way Forward - A New Disability Policy Framework for Australia* -

http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/pubs/policy/way_forward/Pages/default.aspx

⁸ See K. Rudd, Address to the National Disability Awards Ceremony, 23 Nov 2009, <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/6349>

⁹ http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_100128_164123.aspx

¹⁰ P. Shergold, 5 May 2009, “Been There, Done That, Still Hoping for more”

<http://www.csi.edu.au/blog/>

¹¹ A Stronger, Fairer Australia – A New Social Inclusion Strategy Jan 2010

<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Resources.aspx>