**Submission to the National Disability Advocacy Framework consultation by Fiona Tipping**

My name is Fiona Tipping. I am a Palawa woman and part of the Indigenous community in the Grampians area including Ballarat. Along with being an Indigenous community member I also work as an Indigenous disability advocate for a non-Indigenous disability advocacy organisation. I have done so since 2010. Prior to this I worked as a case manager for a disability employment agency. My submission will focus on my experiences as a member of the Indigenous community but also as an Indigenous disability advocate.

Having been active in various Aboriginal Cooperatives as a member and a worker for the last decade has given me an insight into how they operate and respond to the Indigenous community. It is my view that they are very dependent on Government funding. Most of which is short term with the underlying threat that if they don’t respond to Government demands they will lose their funding. Medical centres are no longer just for the Indigenous community. They also service mainstream. Elders in some are not allowed to participate in activities unless they attract a package from Aged Care or the NDIS. All Cooperatives are affected in some way or another by funding demands to the point where it is often felt that funding is dictating culture. None of the Cooperatives that I have been involved in and received services from offer disability advocacy. They are all focused on health. To label them as community controlled is therefore incorrect in my view.

I am very concerned that the frameworks sole idea of strengthening the Indigenous community-controlled sector is ineffective and therefore tokenistic. The term strengthening would suggest that they already have disability advocacy to begin with. From my experience they don’t. You cannot and should not confuse disability advocacy with health. The two are very different. Indeed, mainstream services reflect this difference in eligibility criteria. So, to strengthen the community-controlled organisations you would have to not only create a disability advocacy section but also provide training and skills for this to be adequate. I agree that this needs to happen, but I believe that organisations like the First Peoples Disability Network Australia, as the only peak body for Indigenous disability, should be the focus. They should be the starting point so that they can provide the structure and expertise needed. This includes the non-Indigenous advocacy organizations. The organisation I currently work for has a partnership with the FPDN to provide Indigenous advocacy and support for the Disability Royal Commission. That is my current role. I am the only Indigenous advocate in Victoria currently funded to provide such advocacy and DRC support. This is appalling. Having been mentored and guided by FPDN I have witnessed how grossly underfunded they are, but I have also witnessed how experienced and skilled they are in delivering disability services and programs across Australia.

In summary it is my view that the most effective means of strengthening Indigenous disability advocacy is to better fund the First Peoples Disability Network. FPDN is the only national Indigenous peak body in Australia to deliver disability programs. FPDN already has the structures and expertise in place to deliver disability advocacy. They work with other disability advocacy organizations to ensure they are strengthened to provide culturally safe services. Indigenous community-controlled organizations, including Aboriginal Cooperatives currently deliver health services. They do not provide disability advocacy. FPDN already have the structures in place, but they are grossly underfunded. Strengthening the current and sole Indigenous peak disability provider would be the most effective and sensible way to ensure the strengthening of service provision. It will also ensure that other non-Indigenous disability advocacy organizations are strengthened further through collaboration and guidance from the FPDN. To not do so would be ineffective, tokenistic and therefore disingenuous.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Tipping