



interactive games & entertainment association

Suite 145, National Innovation Centre
Australian Technology Park
4 Cornwallis St, Eveleigh NSW 2015

p: +61 2 9209 4325

To: Arts.Disability@arts.gov.au

National Arts and Disability Strategy
GPO Box 2154
Canberra ACT 2601

**Submission by the Interactive Games & Entertainment Association
(IGEA) to the consultation on a renewed National Arts and Disability
Strategy**

Dear Consultation Team

Introduction

IGEA is the peak industry association representing the business and public policy interests of Australian and New Zealand companies in the interactive games industry. Our members publish, market, develop and distribute interactive games and entertainment content and related hardware.

We are pleased to be able to provide a submission to this consultation on an important issue and to be able to contribute to the planning of a renewed National Arts and Disability Strategy. We also appreciate the recognition in the discussion paper of games as a part of the screen industry and consider that games can provide a wonderful opportunity for Australians from all backgrounds to participate in the creative arts. We welcome the opportunity to assist the Government to better understand games and the Australian game development and publishing industry.

We fully support the key principle of the current National Arts and Disability Strategy that *“all Australians have the right to access and participate in high quality and professional arts and cultural activities, regardless of their abilities, age, gender, cultural and linguistic diversity and geographic location.”* We look forward to this consultation process and hearing from people with disability in the community about what participating in the arts, including games, means to them and how they can be better supported. We then hope there will be an opportunity to work with the Commonwealth and state and territory governments on how a new National Arts and Disability Strategy can better support people with disability to create and play games.

Our [Digital Australia 2018](#) research tells us that people play games for many reasons beyond entertainment, including to de-stress, to keep their minds active, to be challenged, to learn and to exercise. Our research also tells us that people consider games valuable for improving balance and mobility, with one respondent telling us that while he had restricted mobility, he played games to keep his mind sharp. We are also aware of academic research that has been conducted into why people with disability play games. The research revealed that they played games not only for fun and to challenging themselves, but also for health reasons such as managing stress, combating depression, engaging in physical therapy and managing pain.¹

This submission covers three areas of the consultation. First, it provides backgrounds on some of the ways in which game developers, publishers and others in the industry have increasingly sought to make games more accessible to people with disability. Second, it provides examples of how serious games developed in Australia are being used to assist people with disability. Finally, it starts a conversation that we hope can be continued about how a renewed strategy can support people with disability to participate in developing games.

Supporting people with disability to play games

The games industry is an open, progressive and inclusive creative sector. Video games are a wonderful source of entertainment for people with disability to enjoy, and helping to make games more accessible has been a priority for the industry in recent years. This section of the submission provides a number of examples of creative and innovative ways that game developers and publishers have worked to bring games closer to people with disability.

Major gaming consoles such as the Sony PlayStation 4 and the Microsoft Xbox One include a range of accessibility design features, considerations, settings and options. Depending on the console, these may include button remapping, closed captions, large and high contrast text, text-to-speech, zooming, colour inversion and auto-scroll. The explosion of gaming on mobile devices and the development of highly portable consoles like the Nintendo Switch also help to make games even more accessible, particularly to people with limited mobility.

Beyond specific design features, gaming consoles are continually focusing their resources on how to better assist people with disability to play games. One key example of this is the development of controllers designed for players with disability such as Microsoft's [adaptive Xbox controller](#), which was built in

¹ Jen Beeston, Christopher Power, Paul Cairns and Mark Barlet, *Characteristics and Motivations of Players with Disabilities in Digital Games Work in Progress*, 29 May 2018, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1805.11352>

partnership with charity and community groups including the [Ablegamers Charity](#), the [Cerebral Palsy Foundation](#), [SpecialEffect](#) and [Warfighter Engaged](#). Manufacturers of gaming accessories and peripherals have also researched and invested in emerging technologies to make available a range of assistive equipment, including custom and gesture-operated controllers and voice recognition and command software to better support gamers with disability.

Game developers and publishers are increasingly creating games with people with disability in mind and many have brought in specialists to incorporate accessibility into a game's design process early in its development. Games and game series' that have received particular praise for their accessibility features include *Overwatch*, *Uncharted*, *Madden*, *Call of Duty* and *Mario Kart*. Accessibility features that have been incorporated into games include the ability to play with a single hand, the ability to play without sound using captioning and visual movement cues, the ability to skip certain skill events, assisted steering, auto-aiming, auto-acceleration, colour inversion and customisable layouts.

Organisations like the [Ablegamers Charity](#) in the United States and [SpecialEffect](#) in the United Kingdom have made it their mission to assist people with disability to enjoy games, including by providing custom controllers and other customised equipment. Ablegamers has also worked collaboratively with the games industry and academics to develop the [Game Accessibility Guidelines](#) which provides guidance, reference material and best practice to help ensure that games are designed to be as accessible as possible.

A number of games have been particularly celebrated for their playability by people with disability. For example, the game *1-2 Switch* on Nintendo Switch has gameplay features that are playable by blind and vision-impaired people, while the creators of the game *Lost and Hound* designed the game specifically with vision-impaired people in mind. Finally, virtual reality (VR) gaming technology such as the PlayStation VR system provide a wonderful way for people with movement restrictions to experience different places and activities.

Supporting people with disability through serious games

Serious games are an exciting and growing part of the games industry that has enormous potential to be applied for health, education, social and many other purposes. We are just at the start of exploring how serious games can be used to support and improve the lives of people with medical conditions and disability. Some examples of innovative and important uses of serious games that have been developed by Australians include:

- The Australian-made game [Sound Scouts](#) that has been designed to aid the process of detecting hearing difficulties in young children. The game

overcomes the challenges of testing children's hearing through traditional means by turning a hearing test into a fun, narrative-driven game to keep children focused. The Australian Government has provided \$4 million in funding for a national rollout of Sound Scouts.

- The [Advanced Virtual Dementia Experience](#) developed in Melbourne by Opaque Media in collaboration with Alzheimer's Australia Vic provides an immersive experience to give people and carers insight into the effects of dementia, something that is difficult to do using conventional education and is helping to improve patient care.
- The [Smartstep](#) system created by the research institute Neuroscience Research Australia utilises a step mat or touch pad together with a range of games to help people with brain and nervous system disorders like Multiple Sclerosis to maintain or improve their balance and agility.

The 2016 Senate Environment and Communications References Committee [Inquiry into the future of Australia's video games development industry](#) made a number of recommendations to increase funding for Australia's game development industry. It also recommended that the Government facilitate dialogue between interactive games associations and groups that use or could potentially use serious games. We remain supportive of this recommendation and believe it could provide a useful way to further explore how games can be used to support people with disability.

Supporting people with disability to participate in game development

The process of game development, compared to some other forms of art, may be particularly adaptable and appealing to people with disability. The ability to tell stories and narratives in different ways through games create almost limitless potential for expressing creativity and sharing perspectives. For example, the game *An Aspie Life* was created by an Australian developer with autism to help people better understand and empathise with people affected by autism or Asperger Syndrome. It is also important to recognise that the process of game development is not restricted to programmers, but encompasses a wide range of more traditional kinds of artists. Participants in game development often include designers, graphic and digital artists, actors including voice actors, cinematographers, screenwriters and composers.

The discussion paper notes that the creative sector can be a challenging career path for many people, both with and without disability, and this is certainly the case for game development. The game development industry in Australia is currently small and not anywhere near its full potential, with just 928 full-time employees according to our research. The game development industry in Australia is currently also not supported by the Australian Government, in



interactive games & entertainment association

Suite 145, National Innovation Centre
Australian Technology Park
4 Cornwallis St, Eveleigh NSW 2015

p: +61 2 9209 4325

contrast to the other screen sectors of film and TV, which further limits the industry's potential and ability to expand and provide employment.

In this business and policy environment, opportunities for game development are currently limited and, despite the supportiveness of the industry, this means that it can be challenging for people with (and without) disability to forge careers in game development. We would welcome an opportunity following this consultation process to further discuss how people with disability can be better supported to participate in game development through a renewed National Arts and Disability Strategy.

We thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission on this important consultation.

With regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Curry', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ron Curry
CEO
Interactive Games & Entertainment Association

3 December 2018