

## Transcript

Title: Someone else's issue? Technology and human rights of people with a disability  
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JANE FARMER: OK, excellent. Well, welcome everybody here today to hear from our great speaker and supportive questioners, talking about technology and human rights of people with a disability. This is part of our Society 4.0, People and Technology. Webinars I am Jane Farmer. I'm Director of the Social Innovation Research Institute at Swinburne. And our Institute looks at how technologies can work as part of innovation to empower and enable people.

I'd like to move to an acknowledgment. So I acknowledge that I am hosting this webinar from the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. I also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which you're all working today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this webinar. I pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters.

And just a bit of housekeeping before we get started. So we really encourage you to put comments and questions for our speaker, Ben. And please feel free to pop your questions in the chat, and we will post these to our speaker during the Q&A time. Alternatively, you can use the Raise Hand button to verbally ask your question at that point.

And finally, this session is being recorded, and it may be published on our website and social media pages or those of our partners. If you do not want to appear in the recording during the Q&A, please email our research events officer Paul Lavey, whose email address is here at paullavey-- all one word-- @swinburne.edu.au. We'll distribute this recorded thing to you all shortly after the session.

And so technology is central to our daily activities, and increasingly, the gateway for people to access their rights. For many people, technology can provide a gateway to inclusion, or it can result in being a barrier. Research has shown that Australians with disability experience lower digital inclusion rates compared with those who do not have a disability. And with 19% of people in Australia experiencing some form of disability, there's an imperative to ensure technology keeps pace with diverse people's needs.

We're very lucky today to have a Dr. Ben Gauntlett, the Disability Discrimination Commissioner from the Australian Human Rights Commission with us as the star of the show, if the others don't mind me saying that. Ben led the Commission's engagement with the Royal Commission into violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability. As Disability Discrimination Commissioner,

he has reported to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Australia's progress under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He has illustrious qualifications in law, and he has practised and taught law.

The chief questioners here today with us are Mark Hanson, who is a Community Engagement Coordinator with the Australian Quadriplegics Association. Mark lives with a spinal cord injury and is inspired by the possibilities that can be released through adapting, using technologies and other ways. Mark is a peer mentor with AQA and Mark is, as I understand it, on Swinburne's Advisory Board for the MedTechVic Initiative.

And we also have Matt Warren, who is joining us from his holiday. So thank you so much, Matt, a special thanks. Matt is a Chief Experience Officer at Yooralla. Bringing a lived experience with disability as Chief Experience Officer, Matt provides leadership on customer engagement, consultation, and co-design activities with customers, their families, and broader support networks to improve the experiences of those supported at Yooralla.

And just to give you an idea of what's going to happen today, first of all, we'll start off with Ben giving us a bit of background about what happens at the Australian Human Rights Commission that he's involved in and some current things that might be happening that are particularly, perhaps, related to technologies. Then, we will swing into a coordinated Q&A session, which Matt and Mark will be posing some questions that we've discussed before. And towards the end, we hope to have 15 to 20 minutes of open Q&A for our audience, you participants.

So hopefully, as I said, but at any point, put your questions and comments in the chat, and we'll tackle those, as well, perhaps, as we go along. So without further ado, I'd first like to hand over to you, Ben, who are extremely welcome here, perhaps to give us a little bit of background on what you do at the Human Rights Commission and things that are going on at the moment that might be particularly relevant to technology. Over to you.

BEN GAUNTLETT: Thanks for having me, Jane. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which I'm presenting to you from, which is in Sydney, which is Cadigal land of the Eora Nation. And I pay my respects to Aboriginal leaders past, present, and emerging. And I acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the audience today.

We talk about the role of what the Human Rights Commission is doing in the technology space, it's important to realise that across the Commission, different things can be happening. But in relation to the Disability Discrimination Portfolio, that is a policy portfolio where you sit upon about 10 to 15 different government committees, which includes COVID-19 responses, National Disability Insurance Agency-related committees, but also committees relating to transport, housing, and standards, et cetera.

We have two projects, at the moment, which we're pursuing. One is on employment, called IncludeAbility. And we have a housing project that we're undertaking with Monash University in relation to building accessible housing and having inclusive design within that housing. I also chair the Disability Advisory Council for the Australian Disability Strategy, which was just released in

December last year. And that has a number of policy areas relating to technology which are woven through it.

But because the policy framework is set over a decade, it's going to take some time to put the foundations in place to enable the benefits of the ADS-- the Australian Disability Strategy-- to be seen. And what it relies upon is Commonwealth, state, territory, and local government trying to coordinate policy, where they bring the community and people with disability with them to work together to make good policy responses, rather than the left hand and the right hand never speaking until the final policy is created.

And then, on top of that, there was quite an important policy initiative which is wrapped up, in some ways, but is on to its next phase in another called the National Disability Data Asset. And within that, that's received some initial funding and has got through a gateway point where it's now being, I guess, planned out. And what that will do will be provide linked data sets of lives of people with disability to hopefully provide a platform to ensure that good disability policy is created but also that invisible need becomes visible.

The jobs-- there's quite a lot of work on, in terms of what we have to do. There are 4.4 million Australians living with disability, but it's also important to acknowledge that 80% of disability is invisible and that people with disability are diverse. The disability itself is diverse, too.

And so what we try and emphasise is the importance of looking at the individual, respecting their human rights, but also trying to educate about what is meant by human rights so that we get good policy for all Australians going forward.

JANE FARMER: Awesome. Thanks so much. Over to you, Matt, to kick off with you guys' question session.

MATT WARREN: Thanks, Jane. Thanks for your time today, as well. Ben, the last couple of months, I've been on the road a lot with Yooralla visiting all our sites. And one of the issues that comes out again and again is that most basic of human rights of the ability to communicate. What are your thoughts about the availability of technologies and the abilities now to afford communication opportunities that have never been available before?

BEN GAUNTLETT: I think it's excellent that we have technology seeking to include people with disability. Technology can be a great enabler, but it can also be deeply exclusionary if it doesn't include a person. And so what we need to be mindful of is that 90% is not good enough. We actually have to try and always make sure that each and every person has the ability to be included.

That may mean, sometimes, an adaptation to a particular type of product. But ideally, what it means is that the product is universally designed so everyone can use it the same way so we're all treated equally. One of the challenges in this area is getting the regulation piece right, though. Because innovation in technology, particularly in terms of ICT, moves incredibly quickly. And by the time the legislation comes on, sometimes the actual technology is outdated that you're seeking to regulate.

So there is an element of-- I think a lot of people can agree on the outcome. What we need to do is to get the design understanding piece right and then also to emphasise the inclusion of people and

to enable each and every person to communicate in a way that they are comfortable with as being a basic human rights standard which we should all deem appropriate.

MATT WARREN: Then, if we pick up that thread a little bit further, what are your thoughts about how and when we include people with disabilities in those design processes and those understanding process?

BEN GAUNTLETT: Earlier the better. Housing is a good example, although, it's often the built environment. It's 22 times more expensive to retrospectively fit out a house to be accessible than it needs to make it accessible up front. And the other thing that's quite peculiar about that is the house builder would get paid twice. They get paid to build the house and then to renovate the house.

Now, what we want to have is a situation where we're as efficient, as effective as possible. For that to occur, we need people with disability to be included up front. But also when we say included, we mean meaningfully included. So they're given the information as to what the organisation is trying to achieve and to work from there and then to have a really important critical feedback loop. When something does work, to try and work out why that is and improve for next time.

What often can occur is when something doesn't work, it's just-- the conversation goes dead. What we need, actually, is there to be a really clear imperative that universal design is good design. And we have legislation to support how that takes place.

But also, we have a societal expectation that it should take place. And in that societal expectation, we talk in schools, in universities, in other areas, in technical colleges about the benefits of inclusion and the benefits of universal design. So when people come to build or design something, it's at the forefront of their mind, not an afterthought where someone has said, have you thought about this?

MATT WARREN: Mark, did you want to jump in there at all?

MARK HANSON: I guess I want to know the-- what can we learn from practise overseas in making tech available-- to tech, with tech, or via tech in Australia, and how can we apply that in Australia?

BEN GAUNTLETT: I think what we can learn from overseas is but it's not just about legislation, that you do have to have legislation. That we need to educate the tech organisations and organisations that are designing products of the benefits, but we also need to educate people with disability as to how they can use tech.

So not everyone is aware of the manner in which an iPhone, for example, may be able to incorporate accessibility features. We need to pick up those features. But the balance we also have to pick up is we need the organisations who create apps to be really mindful of people with disability and then to have base legislative requirements as to what's needed.

But one of the benefits of the Australian Disability Strategy if it-- and the National Disability Strategy that existed 10 years before that, the implementation of that strategy could best be described as patchy. There were some very good outcomes, but there are some not-as-good outcomes-- is, if we can measure assess and reevaluate how we do things, hopefully we can get tech that is fit for

purpose and that this constantly evolving and improving to suit the needs of people with disability. Where we can learn from other countries that you need this coordinated approach and maybe, for example, you might borrow the legislation that's being used in Europe but balanced out with, say, the United States' emphasis on dynamic efficiency and inclusion on certain issues.

MARK HANSON: Amazing. Thank you. I want to move into employment, as well, and especially meaningful employment for people with disability. What are we doing for people? What are the range of ways people can find out about an access range of meaningful employment?

BEN GAUNTLETT: There are a number of government employment programmes. There's the Disability Employment Services. There's Job Access. You can look at the Department of Social Services has a number of education mechanisms in terms of giving people employment supports, and the National Disability Insurance Agency also has an employment programme.

We run-- at the Australian Human Rights Commission-- a programme called IncludeAbility. And what IncludeAbility seeks to do is to get some of the largest employers in Australia-- and they include, for example, we've got three of the four major banks, some significant consulting companies, law firms, Woolworths, Kmart, the New South Wales Public Service and the Australian Public Service, through the Australian Public Service Commission-- to talk about how they can make the employment offerings they have for people with disability better.

And when we talk about meaningful employment, I think what we have to stress is it is the recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disability in their careers. And meaningful means not just a job, but a good job. And not just work, but a career.

I've used meaningful a lot when I talk about employment. It's often used in a lot of human rights instruments. Some people absolutely hate the word, so I have to acknowledge that, that they don't-- to me, what meaningful also means is that a person might very much want to work in a role where they're not paid that well, but they just really like the job. Or they might like voluntary work of some sort. That is their choice. But they should have the legal right to earn award wages.

And what we're trying to do-- and shortly after this seminar today I've got another meeting of the Disability Employment Services Reference Group which is looking at amending disability, or giving feedback to the Disability Employment Services Programme. And there's the National Employment Services Model which is being released at the same time by the government in 2023, I think. What we need to do is to give information to people with disability that's accessible.

We need to raise the expectations of society, but also the support networks of people with disability as to what's meant by a good job. And within that, we need to then educate employers to have programmes that are innovative and well-thought-out. And I always say to get disability employment programmes within an organisation to work well, it's the three L's.

It's leadership from the top level of the organisation, but also the individuals that deal with people with disability every day showing that it matters to them. It's got to be long-term. That is, you've got to think about it over a period of time. It's not a one-off change. And then, it's learning. You've got to learn from what's worked well and learn from what hasn't worked, and then use that to try and create a better system going forward. There

Are a number of not-for-profits that work in this area, as well, and for-profits. But our website, [includeability.gov.au](http://includeability.gov.au) has a series of fact sheets designed for employers but also employees, and we'll be building on that. But what we really want to do is to emphasise that when we talk about jobs, and good jobs, and meaningful employment, it's about recruit, retain, and advance, in something that's not just a job, but a good job for that individual that leads to a career.

MARK HANSON: Thank you.

MATT WARREN: Ben, I'm going to pick up on one of your L's there, the learning L and employment thread. And I think about the last two years, which forced us all to work very, very differently. And I wonder as to whether some of the ways of working made it actually more accessible for certain persons. What are your thoughts about the learnings of the last two years for all employers and employees and how we embed those learnings in making workplaces and working more inclusive going forward?

BEN GAUNTLETT: I think when we say working remotely, it's really important to understand that not everyone has an office job. So for some people that turn up on site, COVID has caused enormous angst. And not every disability is the same. And so for some people, electronic access is a very different issue than others.

So for example, cognitive, and intellectual disability, people who might have low vision, et cetera, they need online accessibility to be thought of differently. But what flexibility has taught us is that people with disability, their needs are often very similar to other diversity characteristics. And we should not underestimate the importance of understanding intersectionality.

But if we're going to say, if you're going to work different hours, that might be the same as a single parent. If you're going to need inflation a certain format, that might be the same as different cultural backgrounds, et cetera. What we need to get to a point is to understand that flexible work conditions often create better employment circumstances for the employee.

And they're good for the business, because you get a loyal, hardworking employee who's likely to stay for longer in your organisation. And what can, unfortunately, people can underestimate is that having people want to be present, having people like their jobs, having people engaged is a really critical aspect of building organisations. And when people feel that not just themselves but their colleagues are valued, they very much want to work for that organisation.

And so by-- what I think has been learnt in COVID is flexibility has a lot of benefits for people. But I think what's probably not been articulated quite as well is that that flexible, online environment is not good for everyone. And I think we have to be really vigilant to make sure that each and every person with disability benefits from any form of flexibility. Or if they don't benefit, there's a reasonable adjustment to include them.

MATT WARREN: So can we pick that thread up a little bit, Ben? What are the reasonable adjustments you think of when you talk about those adjustments?

BEN GAUNTLETT: Well, for example, screen readers, the type of software that's used. If a person has low-hearing or is deaf, Auslan interpretation, captioning, how meetings are undertaken. It may be

that it's better to meet in-person for certain individuals, conducting people in-person, making sure that if a person works better from the office, they can still do so, or from the factory, or the shop floor, or something like that. Just trying to appreciate the disability is diverse, and people with disability are diverse, too. And if we can pick up those elements that we don't leave anyone behind, that's incredibly important.

MATT WARREN: And the other aspect that I guess came through, Ben, for me through COVID, was the risk of-- ah. I'm on holiday, --- social isolation through working remotely, again. How do we, at one hand, design for better working environment, but the other side, think about the risk of socialisation in working and using technologies remotely?

BEN GAUNTLETT: I think the first thing is to talk about it, is to still say, this is a big issue. We want you to feel connected. Ask the question, do you feel connected? I think when we start to ask people with disability those questions, and we start to ask all employees that are connected, it's incredibly important.

And it's not just a question for people with disability. It's a question for everyone. It's not just a question, also, for people with disability in that not everyone is willing to disclose their disability. So sometimes it's good to just ask everyone. And the other issue is that 80% of disability is invisible. So in asking the question, you might get an answer you do not expect.

But I think it is incredibly important that organisations, workplaces, whether it be employment or other settings, understand that probably the effects of COVID can be-- or the way how society has responded to COVID-- can be incredibly isolating. And what we do need to do is to look out for each other and to put in place checks and balances to make sure everyone's OK. Doesn't take a lot of effort, but can have a lot of benefit.

MATT WARREN: Thanks, Ben. Over to you, Matt.

MARK HANSON: All right, no worries. So my next topic is accessibility in public transport. So you've got initiatives in all different states where we have opportunity-- or people with disability have opportunities to travel for free.

But I'm in Melbourne, so one of the things, for me, is that it's free for the ones that I can actually get on. I spent a bit of time in Europe, and I like their set up. What can we learn from international best practises, and what kind of action plans are in place?

BEN GAUNTLETT: I have to be a little bit careful how I answer this question. The reason why I have to be a little bit careful is there are some exemption applications that are presently before the Australian Human Rights Commission, which, although they're dealt with by another aspect of the Australian Human Rights Commission, I can't really comment in relation to. So you have to preface my comments at a reasonably high level.

What we do know is that transport is an incredible enabler for people with disability to live a better life. The expectation that each and every individual has a driver's licence and the car and the ability to get between two places is an inaccurate one. But we need to-- when we design from scratch-- again, include people with disability.



But the other aspect is to make it part of a holistic consideration of a person with disability's life. So I attended a talk in relation to the City of Sydney. I think it was one or two nights ago. And they were talking about transport into the city.

And one of the people who was on the panel talked about that public transport is really at its most beneficial if the users live within 1 kilometre of the station. So we need to coordinate not only the public transport, the accommodation where that is in relation to that public transport. And we need to make sure that we have public transport that's accessible across, not just physical disability, but in terms of its signalling, and its electronic access, and things like ticketing.

Unfortunately, overseas, what has tended to happen is that the reform agenda has sometimes not occurred as it should have in terms of what's taken place. What I think we have to emphasise is the importance of, when something's done new, it is done absolutely to the fullest extent possible appropriately for people with disability. When we look at refurbishment or retrofitting, do we do that with an innovative framework in terms of what we're trying to get done.

And then, finally, that we always have a base safety net to ensure that people with disability can get where they need to go in terms of things like hospital appointments, et cetera. Because we do need to always make sure that people can get out of their homes and access essential services.

MARK HANSON: Great, thank you.

MATT WARREN: I'm going to hop back to one of mine, Ben, that I missed talking about before this. There's an immense range of assistive technologies available, both within Australia and can be accessed overseas. And I'm sort of thinking aloud. How do we make those range of assistive technologies available using other technologies?

How do I find where I can get the latest and greatest screen readers, for example? If I've got funding, for example, under NDIA for assistive tech, how do I make best utilisation of that funding? Where do I go to find that information out?

BEN GAUNTLETT: Yeah. They used to-- what was called independent learning centres that exist in each state which had often physical goods that you would look at. I think we need to be really mindful that when we look at the National Disability Insurance Scheme, it is not seen in isolation.

So there's the THC. There's equivalent accident compensation schemes in other places. There are other forms of funding and support for people in aged care and those types of circumstances. And we need to make sure that we have appropriate provision of goods and services throughout all those programmes.

Now, within that, there is a need to acquire certain types of technology, et cetera and use it the appropriate way. Part of it is the training of health professionals and Allied Health Professionals to know what's there. Another way is to ensure that people with disability can easily access information about how to live a life of their choosing and how people do that.

Now, the National Disability Data Asset, if it ever played out in a decade's time, because it takes an incredibly long time for these programmes to be built, would hopefully have some sort of outward-



looking role where how people or what they access is able to be, in a sense, be used to give people an idea as to what is a good life. And within that, what we need to do is we need to emphasise that if we can create information for people with disability that is understandable-- and their support networks-- it's going to be used more.

And so for example we made some guidelines relating to COVID-19 and the hospital system. Those guidelines were used overseas quite a bit in a number of forums. What we found was that it was the work examples we had in the back of the guidelines that people found the most educative, in terms of what we were trying to convey.

And so we need organisations and governments to try and think, it's not just that I've put the information on a website. It's when someone accesses that website, what did they take from it? And so we've got to have the stories of how people have used technology so people can learn from it and use it themselves.

And that has to be part of the-- when we try and communicate that we don't just accept it's not just about putting the information on a website. It's what people take from it when they access the website that's incredibly important. And that includes the use of technology as an example to others to build a better life.

MATT WARREN: Ben, one last one. I want to stitch a few threads together. Very early on, you talked about that the course of retrofitting homes with accessibility features and so forth. Just then, you talked about people choosing their own life. And earlier, we talked about designing with and designing for from the very beginning. What are your thoughts about bringing all those pieces together to design homes that enable people to live much more independent lives?

BEN GAUNTLETT: Yeah, I think the amendment to the National Construction Code to make accessibility in all new houses and apartments was a very good outcome. It was very good from a human rights perspective. The best way to get the viewpoint of people with disability into housing or stuff like that is to employ them in your organisation, and they'll probably tell you while you're building it. And that's why employing people with disability is so critical.

But it's also a bit more than that. Because if you want to create social change, they often say that you've got to have a long-term approach, such as three years. You've got to engage at the personal, organisational, and societal level. And there's got to be multiple channels through which you do that.

And so we need to educate the design professionals of the future. And this is what part of our Programme with Monash University is about. I was-- for want a better expression-- the client for a house, and they built a little house. And look, it was very, very nice, and it had some very nice architectural flourishes in it, which I particularly enjoyed.

But within that design is if we can educate the designers, the Allied Health Professionals, the individuals involved in planning as to the importance of accessibility, it's cheaper. But also, it in future-proofs the housing stock for generations. So when we talk about the pressure on aged care, when we talk about young people in aged care, when we talk about access to specialist disability accommodation, one of the discussion points that's incredibly critical is, what is the housing stock for people with disability in a particular area?

And if we have good housing so that people can go and live in their own houses and it becomes a home, it's incredibly important. And so what we need to do is we need to employ people with disability. We need to educate people with disability, but then we need to make it a societal concern, as well.

And so when we look at things-- talk about sustainability, when we talk about climate change and things like that, an aspect of sustainability that is not often discussed, but should be, is the inclusion of people with disability. And so when we have things like six stars for climate, why can't we have six purple stars for accessibility, and things of that nature?

JANE FARMER: Awesome. I might jump in there, guys. Because look, it's nearly 20 to. There's some fabulous questions lining up there in the chat. Just to give you a couple of more seconds to put some more in, and maybe I could throw at a question of my own.

We are data nerds here, Ben, and I'm really interested in the National Disability Data Asset and how - we do a lot of work with nonprofits, and it's quite a journey developing data capability in organisations themselves. I'm interested in how, I guess, end users, or consumers, or clients, or people with a disability were involved in decisions about what data to collect. Has that happened?

BEN GAUNTLETT: It hasn't yet happened. There was a Disability Advisory Council, which I chaired. And there were some wonderful contributions from people from all across Australia, from walks of life, and there was some consultation undertaken. And what was, in the end, recommended to government was a process, which would be, in effect, ask people with disability about what is the best data to use and try and explain the linkage of that data and why it could be useful and include them on every stage of the journey.

It's obvious that everyone has their own view as to what's really important data, whether it be physical access or transport-related data. I think one of the things that I've always felt this Human Rights Commission should be quite open to is we shine the brightest light into the darkest places. And what we should always push for is to ensure that each and every Australian is treated with dignity and respect.

And so what I think about that is that I would hope that some of the data would be collected would be very clear about trying to ensure that we keep Australians safe, that we make sure that they are respected at all times and that everyone is treated with dignity. And looking at how people who may need support for decision-making are looked after I would hope would be one of the earliest areas that be considered.

Because we've had some very, very egregious circumstances in the last five years in Australia of people with disability having some really quite tragic outcomes. And I just think that as a society, we should have a very clear mandate that that's not something we ever want to see repeated.

JANE FARMER: Great. OK, there's quite a few questions and comments here in the chat. So I'm just going to-- apologise to everybody whose questions I don't manage to get to. But here's one from John Noxon. I'm an older person with SCI quadriplegia.

I'm not eligible for NDIS, and I'm relying on my aged-care funding, but totally inadequate for expensive equipment needs, like power wheelchairs, hoist car mods, et cetera. Is the Human Rights Commission aware of this? What can we do to assist the 50% of people with disability who are aged over 65?

BEN GAUNTLETT: Yes, we are aware about the issue, John. It's very important issue. It's an issue that-- the caretaker period will, unfortunately, create a stop in terms of what can be done in relation to-- because during caretaker, everything, in a sense, gets paused. But what needs to occur is at a ministerial level, I think there needs to be an assessment as to, how do we ensure that people over the age of 65 are receiving the necessary supports to live a good life?

It's not about necessarily duplicating a Programme. It's about making sure that the programmes provide the necessary need. If that means it's easier to duplicate the Programme, so be it. But what we do need is we need that needs analysis to take into account what's required.

Within that discussion, what we need to be also really mindful of is the concept of human dignity, that everyone has the right to live a good life. And that means that we acquire the relevant technology for individuals to live a good life. And what that means and how we do that is something that should be pursued.

What can often be very, very difficult in this setting is, if you rely purely upon market-based mechanisms, particularly in rural and regional Australia, sometimes those services do not exist. And so we just need to be really mindful of, it's not just about announcing a pot of money. It's about creating a system where there is measurement as to what's occurring and then also a review of outcomes, but a clear focus that we value each and every human is important.

It is something that we're aware of. It is something that needs to improve. But for it to improve, there will be need for ministerial input and change to particular laws and funding regimes, which is likely to take place after the election.

I don't know when the election's called, but from my understanding, it will be called-- has to be called within the next fortnight. So I do appreciate the premise of your question. I'm very hopeful that things will improve.

JANE FARMER: Thanks. Here's a question from Anne Downey. I'm interested in the views of the Human Rights Commission on the use of surveillance and safety monitoring technology to reduce dependence by people with cognitive impairment on 24/7 human support.

BEN GAUNTLETT: I think there's is a bit of a balance here. That individual must want the technology to be used, firstly. They should be supported to do so. That doesn't mean that there's not a role for technology, though.

Because, for example, to know whether a support worker has reported for their shift, you can use technology. You can use technology to know how long that person has attended that shift or whether they've been to that shift.

And that can then give a good feedback to a safeguarding methodology about, for example, how often the person has been seen, whether the agency who has been assisting them has been assisting them properly. One of the very sad aspects of the late Ann Marie Smith's case in South Australia was that she just did not receive appropriate assistance, but also that there was no framework to assess how she was only having one carer come to her for years, actually. And so we can use data to try and reduce the risk of that occurring in the future.

But technology also does have a role for a person consents to its use. For example, I'm a wheelchair user. If I fall out of my wheelchair, I can't get back into the chair. But you might be able to press a button on your watch which calls someone. And so we can use technology in that way, as well. So I think it's a balance between embracing technology for the individual, but also embracing the use of technology for organisations and regulators to try and ensure that we give people access to a dignified life.

JANE FARMER: Great. OK, here's a question from Nicole Radford. I'm interested in hearing some thoughts about the interface of technology and health care as technology is becoming increasingly used in this sector. What are the areas for consideration and improvement in this space, such as, how health providers increase accessibility of telehealth or video health for people with disability?

How can My Health Record and other digital health platforms be more user-friendly for all people, including people with a disability? So there's a lot in there. But I think the gist is the interface with the health care sector that's increasing use of technology.

BEN GAUNTLETT: So I think one of the issues that we're going to have to confront in Australia over the next few years is an understanding that we only have a limited number of people in the care workforce, or in the Allied Health Workforce, or in the medical workforce relative to our population. And that they will only work, in a sense, a certain amount because of just human nature. A person doesn't work more than 40 hours a week, so to speak.

And how do we ensure that we stretch the resource as far as possible? And telehealth, video health-- some of those options can mean that a person might be able to see five people in a morning rather than one, because they don't have to get transport between the different locations.

What we need to do, though, is embrace technology in a way where we don't let care standards drop. So when a person does need a physical examination, that occurs. And also, to always remember the technology is fallible and can be outwitted, and you do need to, sometimes, just go out and check on the person yourself to see what's taking place.

The issues with My Health Record and things of that nature-- digital health platforms-- they are very helpful. But what they often need to be balanced with is, one, an individual's privacy as to what they want to have stored about them. But then, I think the flip side is is an understanding of how they can be used to benefit the individual.

And health literacy-- that is, the ability of an individual to engage with the health system. That's how I understand the term. I know people have different views as to what it means-- is a really important aspect. I mean, if we can get people with disability or underlying medical conditions-- and it's

important to acknowledge that 47.3% of Australians have an underlying medical condition, which would probably meet the definition of disability under the Disability Discrimination Act-- is the more that we can get people to become literate in terms of the health system, the better.

And what it can mean, for example, is when a person has to go to hospital that we have the form set up to know that when they're discharged, they may be checked in upon, because they have a certain type of disability or underlying medical condition that means they should be checked in upon, because the chances of them returning to hospital is very high. And that's sort of part of how we can use data and health platforms. But we do need to increase the literacy of people using them but balance that with other considerations, like privacy.

JANE FARMER: OK. Just as a follow up to talking about data, and Georgia VanTuren asks, then, can you tell us anything about the NDIS Digital Partnership Programme?

BEN GAUNTLETT: No, I can't. I'm not an NDIS staff member. What I can say is, there's always a balance between going digital and giving people other channels to access service and assistance. And we need to maintain or be very careful to get that balance right.

If we can use technology to mean that people are-- more people are getting assistance for the same amount of resources without that assistance, the effectiveness of that assistance dropping, that's really important. A good example will be, it's not uncommon for me to take a photo of my wheelchair when I've damaged it and send it to an organisation to say, what do I do here? That's very, very helpful, in terms of saving time, et cetera.

And the more that we can do that, the better. But I do think it's important to realise that technology is a tool. It's not the end product that will resolve all issues. And it can sometimes exacerbate disadvantage.

JANE FARMER: Yeah. A salutary reminder, there. OK, thanks. My wonderful colleague, Erin Wilson, has been excitedly putting in various questions and kindly said, ignore them all if other people ask questions. So I'm going to pick one of Aaron's, which is the role of technology, such as robotic assistants, augmented reality, et cetera is not well explored and not funded in relation to disability.

For example, people with a disability could be supported to do a job if a robotic assistant could lift and carry or could gain support from a headset providing AI advice on task completion. Whose responsibility should it be to fund these kinds of technology supports to employment?

BEN GAUNTLETT: The general way in which the law works is that if a person applies for a job and they meet the criteria for the job, it is the employer who pays for the reasonable adjustment. Whilst I very much like the idea of robotics, AI, exoskeletons, things of that nature, I also have to, maybe, be a little bit temperate in my analysis of those technologies in that often, their ability to work at scale for a bunch of different people in a different settings is quite limited. And they are enormously expensive at the present time in terms of their use.

And so what we need to do is we need to understand the importance of the scalability of the technology and the scope of use-- being able to understand that disability is diverse, and people with disability are diverse, too. So a good example of technology and how it has probably changed is

voice-activated technology. When I first had my accident, voice-activated technology was becoming popular.

You had to say one word at a time, and unfortunately, the technology would often pick up profanities if you got a bit frustrated. But now, you could probably work in a number of jobs using voice-activated technology primarily. And that's about the technology improving-- the iPhone and all those Android setups are also good examples.

But it does take time for technology to be widespread enough that it can have societal impacts on inclusion. And we need to have technology solutions that are accessible by a preponderance of people with disability, not one or two well-funded situations where a person could participate. So I think we should encourage technology, but realise, again, it's not the end product.

JANE FARMER: OK, great. Oh, there's another message just come through. I'm thinking about wrapping up here. So thinking about ending on a happy, exciting note. What would you say is this the most exciting, hopeful, difference kind of thing that you can see coming up or on the horizon that you think is going to really potentially impact on accessibility or openness to having all these kinds of different things that we've talked about that, at the moment, are really challenging from a technology space?

BEN GAUNTLETT: I think as we build technology relating to communication, hopefully what it will mean is that more people can communicate and remain connected to their communities. But that always has to be done with an understanding that we must constantly advocate for people who may not be able to advocate for themselves to be included at the same time. And in relation to communication technologies, that is invariably people with low vision or who are deaf, but also people with an intellectual or cognitive disability, and to include them within that communication.

But I think to the extent that communication can help us all remain connected, then hopefully, we can use that as a foundation to deal with critical human rights issues, such as employment. So we need Australia to talk about issues like sustainability. And when they talk about sustainability, to include people with disability in that conversation.

Because when we talk about inclusion and disability policy system that works well, one of the reasons why employment is such an important policy lever to pursue is that if people with disability are getting not just a job, but a good job, it is reflective of a disability policy system that works well. That is, they have housing, they have transport, they have home support, they have access to technology and things of that nature. And those people who may not be able to work often will have a situation where they are given appropriate assistance to live a good life, too.

So I think it's that communications platform that will be created. And hopefully, it will mean that we all remain a bit more connected but in a really good way, where we're not just connected, but we're included. And that's a really important issue.

JANE FARMER: That's awesome. That's a fabulous place to finish, I think. I'd like to thank everybody who came to this webinar. I love the comments-- so many thoughtful and encouraging comments, as well as questions. Thank you all for contributing there-- super grateful and inspired by our

participants here today, our speakers, and questioners. Ben, thank you so much. That's been really awesome, and I feel uplifted. So thank you.

And also to Mark and Matt-- Matt, you can now have your holiday again, and that's really exciting. And Mark, thank you so much, as well. It's been really great to talk to you guys and have you involved. It's been really, really amazing. Thank you so much, and have a great rest of the day and week. And thanks to everyone else who participated. All right, bye.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]