

31 March 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Banking closures in regional Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the inquiry into the impacts of bank closures in regional Australia (the **Inquiry**). Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (**ADA**) appreciates being consulted on this important issue.

About ADA Australia

ADA is a not for profit, independent, community-based advocacy and education service with more than 30 years' experience in informing, supporting, representing and advocating in the interests of older people, and persons with disability in Queensland.

ADA also provides legal advocacy through ADA Law, a community legal centre and a division of ADA. ADA Law provides specialized legal advice to older people and people with disability, including those living with cognitive impairments or questioned capacity, on issues associated with human rights, elder abuse, and health and disability legal issues related to decision-making.

ADA advocates and legal practitioners work with identified First Peoples advocates through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network Queensland (**ATSIDNQ**), a network established to support mob with disability and provide individual advocacy services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

ADA has reviewed the terms of reference and provides feedback in relation to the following issues:

- b) the economic and welfare impacts; and
- c) the effect of bank closures or removal of face-to-face cash services on access to cash.

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Welfare impacts for older persons and people with disability, and loss of access to services

ADA has concerns for persons in regional or remote areas that are affected by the closure of local banks.

ADA advocates recount examples where the possible or imminent closure of a client's local bank has caused increase in distress and anxiety for the client, who is reliant on the in-person service to access their money in a way that is secure and accessible for their circumstances.

There is a clear link between the continuity of these services, and the ability of many older persons and people with disability to maintain aspects of their independence. Aside from concerns that closures will cause practical difficulties for these clients, the emotional, mental and physical tolls associated with anxiety about a loss of independence must also be taken seriously by the Committee.

The loss of an accessibly located bank for older people can be very distressing. It represents a further decline in engagement and the ability to speak to a person directly. Reduction or removal of this service is likely to result in financial management challenges, and will bring with it a series of additional difficulties – such as lessening a person's ability to accessibly resolve outstanding issues or queries about their accounts, making payments, raising a dispute and so forth. This will lead to an increase on advocacy and other supports which are already under-resourced to meet demand, such as aged care financial advocates and related social services.

It may lead to a further increase in guardianship and administration applications, as it systemically reduces an older person's ability to independently manage their own affairs.

Whilst industry may feel that moving to solely online services is an inevitability, ADA urges the Committee to consider the impacts associated not only with this transition for older persons, but the longer-term effects of this removal of personal experience for persons and communities who are already isolated from a broader community by location or personal circumstance.

Measures must be implemented to assist older persons and persons with disability residing in regional and remote locations to ensure that they are able to comfortably participate in the transition of banking services, and to ensure that scaffolding services are in place to assist in the maintenance of an individual's ability to be independent and manage their own financial affairs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. ADA would be pleased to further assist the Committee with its inquiry. Should you wish to discuss this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Vanessa Krulin, Solicitor and Senior Policy and Research Officer [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully



Geoff Rowe
Chief Executive Officer