

Media Release – Calls for change as inaccessible product design impacts the independence of consumers with chronic conditions and disability

The Accessible Product Design Alliance, a group of 11 not-for-profit health consumer organisations, has released a joint position statement to highlight the struggle with inaccessible products and packaging experienced by their 5 million consumers living with chronic conditions and disability across Australia and New Zealand.

The Alliance is focused on raising up their consumers' voices to industry and government for immediate change, as difficult to open products and packaging cause day-to-day frustration for people without disability. However for those living with one or more disabling conditions, they cause unnecessary physical pain, stress and negatively impacts a person's independence.

Hearing the real consumer voice

The Alliance's member organisations represent an important cross-section of the millions of Australians who struggle with inaccessible design and its impacts on their daily lives.

Andrew Potter, *National Advocacy Coordinator* for [MS Australia](#), has lived with multiple sclerosis (MS) for the last 30 years, and shares: "Many of us live with the constant frustration of not being able to open easily what appear to be the simplest of items – a packet of biscuits, a jar of jam, a tube of toothpaste. This limits our choices. It's not just about food packaging which is challenging enough, but many household and personal items come in boxes and packages that are too difficult to open – often we just give up!"

Sophie Marmont, a [Cerebral Palsy Alliance](#) team member says: "For me, as a consumer with cerebral palsy, my purchasing choices depend on my ability to open and use products easily and safely. At Cerebral Palsy Alliance, we believe everyone has the right to access food products and everyday essentials that can be opened independently. That's why we're excited to be part of the Alliance, an initiative which aims to raise the bar on packaging and product design to ensure accessibility for everyone."

A consumer experience from [Parkinson's Australia](#) explains: "Because of the tremor caused by my Parkinson's, opening some packets can be incredibly difficult and frustrating for me and I often need to rely on other people to help me with opening something as simple as a yoghurt lid. Knowing that there is an Alliance fighting in our corner, working towards improving the accessibility of basic everyday items is empowering. It helps me to remember that I am not alone in the fight to maintain my independence."

Design addressing real needs

Raising awareness of a more abilities-diverse consumer base is the first step to inclusive design. Sharon McGowan, *CEO* of [Stroke Foundation](#) said "People living with the impact of stroke often experience reduced functionality in their arms and hands which can make it difficult to navigate everyday products and packaging. We believe that by mandating inclusivity in product design, more people living with disability will retain a level of independence. We look forward to seeing what innovative and creative solutions our manufacturers will develop to help the 20 per cent of our community who experience physical challenges."

[MND Australia](#) *CEO* David Ali said "Given motor neurone disease is a progressive neurological condition which tends to impact hand function and reduces grip as a result of increasing limb weakness, accessible product design is so important. MND Australia applauds the Alliance with its

focus on advocacy and influencing change to ensure accessible products make the daily lives of people with disability or with chronic conditions easier.”

[Muscular Dystrophy Foundation of Australia](#) CEO Ryan Talsma echoes the importance of good design: “People with muscular dystrophy and similar muscle wasting conditions face barriers to participating in society everyday, preventing them from being independent in even the simplest tasks in life like opening a packet. In addition to accessible packaging removing a barrier to independence – it also contributes to societal values of inclusion, fairness, and equality.”

Working together

Jonathan Smithers CEO of [Arthritis Australia](#) said “We have been working for some years now to improve accessibility of products and packaging through our Accessible Design Division. Progress has been made through our first-of-their-kind guidelines and *Ease of Use* and *Easy to Open* Certification. We would love more companies to see this as a pressing issue which has daily consequences for consumer’s lives. We hope that with more voices we can achieve greater change.”

Accessibility is also a Trans-Tasman issue, with [Arthritis New Zealand](#) CEO Philip Kearney saying “In New Zealand over 700,000 people have arthritis making it one of the most common forms of disability in the country. Half of these people are of working age and ease of access to products is a significant issue for them. We know working together in this area will mean the needs of our community will be recognised in improved design solutions.”

Time for change

Nettie Burke CEO of [Cystic Fibrosis Australia](#) says “CFA strives to emphasise and elucidate the problem of invisible illness. Health Equity is impossible in a world where so many people struggle with hidden obstacles and mass market consumer packaging is designed for only one kind of ability profile. We are proud of the work that the Alliance is doing to publicise and rectify this imbalance.”

[Painaustralia](#) CEO Carol Bennett says “In Australia 3.4 million people are living with chronic pain, with inaccessible packaging and products adding to the frustration they’re already experiencing in their day-to-day lives. We encourage companies and organisations to make packaging and products easier to manage as such small changes can make a significant difference to those who are living with pain.”

With the population ageing, and the increasing prevalence of people with chronic conditions and disability, accessible products and packaging should be at the forefront of the design process. We need to work towards a more inclusive future where products are targeted at all consumers instead of just a default dexterity profile. Lewis Kaplan CEO [Huntington's NSW ACT](#) sums up the Alliance’s aim when he said “It’s a simple fact that design which is accessible works for everyone, living with disability or not.”

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About the Accessible Product Design Alliance:

The Accessible Product Design Alliance is a group of not-for-profit consumer health organisations that represent people with chronic conditions who are significantly impacted by inaccessible products and packaging. The Alliance was formed in 2019 to advocate to government and industry to improve access to products and packaging that are easy to use for these consumers and to increase research in the area.

The organisations that form the Alliance are Arthritis Australia, Arthritis New Zealand, Cerebral Palsy Alliance, Cystic Fibrosis Australia, Huntington's Australia, MND Australia (Motor Neurone Disease), MS Australia (Multiple Sclerosis), Muscular Dystrophy Foundation of Australia, Parkinson's Australia, Stroke Foundation of Australia and Pain Australia.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/accessiblealliance/>

Webpage: <https://arthritisaustralia.com.au/accessible-design-division/accessible-product-design-alliance/>