



Commissioner Alex Chisholm, ComReg

**Speaking Notes for Workshop -
Telecommunications Products and Services – Inclusive/Universal
Design for all Users
Wednesday, 5 November 2008**

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is delighted to be co-hosting this workshop for the telecommunications industry today, together with the National Disability Authority (NDA).

ComReg and the NDA jointly established the Forum on Services for People with Disabilities two years ago in order to take forward our work in this area. ComReg is specifically charged under the Communications Act 2002 with ensuring that *all users, including people with disabilities*, derive maximum benefit in terms of choice price and quality.

The Forum is a joint undertaking with the NDA and includes both telecoms operators and representative groupings for people with disabilities. Many of these organisations are represented here today and I would like to put on record our appreciation for the contributions they have made to this Forum. Significant progress has been made, notably with the publication of the Phone and Broadband Guide for People with Disabilities and Older People, the Disability Survey, improved accessibility of operator websites and services and the hosting of the CEO's Breakfast Briefing on 15 October 2008.

An important element of our Forum is that it is inclusive, with representatives from the industry, ComReg, the NDA, representatives of organisations for people with disabilities and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. The work of the Forum continues and the latest initiative - to develop a billing standard for the benefit of all customers, including those with disabilities - has resulted in ComReg, in conjunction with the Excellence Ireland Quality Association (EIQA), developing a Bill Presentation standard that we are launching tomorrow, 6 November 2008.

Turning to today's workshop. Communication services are a crucial part of our daily lives. Many people could scarcely imagine going about their work or their social lives without the use of phone, internet or other electronic communications services. Hence, it has never been more important for all users, including people with disability, to benefit fully. This means

- Access to appropriately designed devices and services.
- Access to clear and useful information.
- And an opportunity to shape the development of new products and services.

This last element is what today is about. It is an opportunity for dialogue between providers of communications services and those of their customers who have particular needs, arising from disability or other factors. Factoring in these needs at an early stage – wearing the product design or marketing hat, not just the corporate citizenship or legal compliance hat – is the best way to satisfy this important group of customers. And Universal Design – about which we will hear more from

the expert speakers to follow – is a key tool for achieving this very worthwhile goal.

Universal design is about user-centred design for all users. This includes people with disabilities and also other groups in society, such as the elderly, who may face challenges availing of communications products and services. In the present challenging economic times, universal design that is inclusive could provide a business opportunity for telecoms providers. In addition to the revenue received from customers, universal design has the ability to benefit companies by, for example, reducing the level of customer complaints and, thus, enhancing the customer experience.

I believe there are clear benefits from universal design for all sectors of society, but also for companies through improved ability to address the needs of the wider customer base. I welcome the commitment that companies have shown to date and would encourage you to give your continued commitment to keeping up the momentum.