

Dear NDIA

We are writing in response to the discussion paper released from the NDIA entitled "Towards Solutions for Assistive Technology". We have read and considered the paper and lodge our reply to you as parents of a young adult with a disability and as a assistive technology (AT) supplier.

Despite the fact that we have been involved with the AT sector for over 30 years, we found this document to be very confusing and conflicting. We are hoping that the way in which it has been presented has not deterred people from reading it through and making comments on its content and agenda. It is vital that feedback is sought and received from a broad range of people that will be affected by these proposed changes.

Choice and Control for Participants is Positive

We were initially pleased to read about a potential framework that will facilitate an individualised, participant empowered AT service. Participants will value that they now have control and choice over what equipment and services they require. This fact must boost their morale and confidence no end.

On reading further into the document, we were extremely disappointed that the proposed framework will actually severely compromise AT choice to participants.

Reduction in number of AT suppliers will reduce participant's choice

Participants have enjoyed access to a range of AT provided by a range of suppliers. One would think that maintaining the various existing suppliers and their experienced staff would ensure maximum participant choice. To the contrary you are proposing a model whereby the range of AT available will be streamlined and one can only assume reduced.

Proposed framework will potentially lose skilled AT suppliers

Many AT suppliers have worked in the sector for a significant period of time and as a consequence have developed highly specialised skills in this area. If implemented, this proposal will be a certain way of seeing the industry lose valued and necessary businesses and skills. I strongly believe that this framework does not have the participant's best interests at heart. The choice factor will be diminished very quickly along with the experience and skill that supports these participants which has been built up over decades.

Supplier / health professional / participant relationships and trust will be lost

Participants have built relationships with their health professionals and suppliers over the years. The comfort employed in those relationships sets a good environment that helps get the fitting of the participant and the equipment much more accurate as they are usually in a relaxed state with their body performing as it naturally would on any given day. Many participants are unfortunate in that they don't have a significant other person in their lives to support them in the decision making process of what can be an overwhelming and confronting task. These participants particularly value the relationships they have developed with the health professional and supplier.

Participant confidence will be reduced

Many participants suffer uncertainty and anxiety when new people are introduced to the process of selecting AT. This can have a detrimental result with a positive outcome at the fitting / trial stage being far less likely. The people who are proposing these changes must broaden their outlook, to clearly understand and recognise that trials and fittings can be very personal with many elements of touch and feel between client, health professional and AT supplier. The comfort, health and wellbeing of the user should not be compromised by cost saving measures.

Loss of individualised service

The proposed framework places the existing highly individualised service at risk. Existing AT suppliers have developed an understanding of client's skills, challenges, likes, dislikes, family dynamics etc. When a good working and comfortable relationship between all parties has been established it is paramount that this continues on into the future.

Sustainability of the program

As parents of a young adult with a disability we fully value and appreciate that the NDIS needs to be sustainable over a long period of time. We speak of maximising participants choice and empowerment yet on the other hand ruthless decisions are being contemplated to put participants in a compromised situation for their choice of equipment and associated services. The decision makers must be aware of the realities the participants face on a day to day basis and give some serious thought as to whether putting cost savings ahead of the participants lifestyle, health and wellbeing is in the best interests for them and if in the long term the perceived cost savings will be a reality.

Concerns with responsiveness

As an experienced AT supplier, we are well aware that often the clients functional condition deteriorates quickly resulting in an urgent appointment being required. I am highly concerned that the proposed framework has not considered the importance of having local, experienced AT suppliers readily available. An example to highlight this point: Last week a client's mobility deteriorated to the point that she could no longer transfer with the assistance of staff in her supported accommodation. The OT contacted us in the morning and by that evening we had trialled and sought approval from the NDIA for urgent supply of a mobile hoist. The supported accommodation advised that if the hoist had not been provided in such a responsive manner that the client would have been hospitalised. This is not consistent with empowering participants with choice and control.

Irreversible decision

The proposed supply arrangements will see many of the existing experienced AT suppliers and their skilled staff gone. In 1 years time after the experience and skills have been lost and it is realised this new way is not suitable and is failing our participants it will be too late to re-think these suggested proposals, and it will be the participants left to pay the penalty and suffer the consequences.

We send this response in the hope that these particular proposals for the future are abolished and that any new plans for the future will ensure participants will receive the appropriate AT and services that they so justly deserve.

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