

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write with regard to the National Disability Insurance Agency's Towards Solutions for Assistive Technology Discussion Paper released by the National Disability Insurance Agency in December of 2014 with a closing date for submission of February 28, 2015 which prompts the very first question as to why such a compressed timeline between release and final submission date on such important far reaching issues.

I have read your paper with interest and it poses a number of questions which I believe to be relevant knowing that the rollout of the NDIS is rapidly approaching.

By way of introduction I come from a background of involvement within the 'disabled industry' having contracted polio at age twenty months with extensive hospitalisation and constant use of specialised equipment which included walking frames, callipers, crutches and finally wheelchairs. My working involvement in the disability field has spanned some forty plus years. During that time had it not been for assistive technology in the form of specialised equipment many of those with whom I worked for would not have had the opportunity to participate in everyday life which included sport or recreation. As the founder of Disabled WinterSport Australia I with others were able to facilitate opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in these activities. Those opportunities would not have been available without the support of assistive technology and specialised equipment.

The following are a couple of relevant points which I do not believe your paper has addressed.

Historically assistive technology and special equipment used by people with disabilities to engage in everyday life was built upon disabled individuals themselves who through innovation and determination built equipment to suit their ongoing needs. With the realisation that no two disabilities are the same eg: what may suit an amputee in a wheelchair will not suit a paraplegic, these pathfinders build organisations able to cater to individual requirements. These small and highly effective organisations continue to provide those vital individual day to day needs. Is this vital aspect of assistive technology under threat?

I was of the understanding that choice by the individual was the paramount underlying principal under which the NDIS was instigated in the first place.

As purported in your paper only a selection of assistive equipment will be bulk warehoused. Who is to decide what range of equipment is to be stored? I can appreciate there are opportunities to warehouse and recycle some items of equipment in the form of walking frames, crutches etc but most certainly not disability specific specialised items such as wheelchairs and the like.

Who are to provide the essential specifications necessary to ensure the item of specialised equipment will ideally suit the user. Has this vital aspect of assistive technology in your paper been budgeted for? The possibility of creating situations of exacerbating a client's disability with the supply of inappropriate equipment without specialist support could be a very real possibility.

The possibility of creating a 'Bunnings' type bulk warehouse system in fraught with the dangers of creating a rod for its own back let alone the burden of additional costs associated with the scheme. Which I might add as not been addressed in your paper.

In conclusion I reiterate that if the NDIS is to succeed then its primary and only focus must be based on individuals needs. For too long people with a disability have been forced to take second best and it was with a relief and gratitude that government had finally taken a 'glass half full'

approach to disability when it first instigated the NDIS. Now your paper is once again reverting back to cutting and compressing services which will once again impact upon the quality of life of the people it was conceived to serve.

Ron Finneran AO