



28/02/2015

To:

NDIA

Senator Mitch Fifield

Louise Markus Federal member for Macquarie

Assistive Technology Suppliers Australasia

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NOTE I give permission for my comments to be made public by all of the above

Submission in response to:

National Disability Insurance Agency's

Towards Solutions for Assistive Technology Discussion Paper

RE: Supply and Procurement of Assistive Technology (AT) to participants of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

I am the owner and manager of two conjoined services providing AT to people with a Disability. We are based on the suburban fringe of metropolitan Sydney.

Disability Hire Vehicles is our speciality or 'niche' in the industry - a unique service providing rental motor vehicles specifically modified for people with a disability. Our sibling company, Wheelchairs & Stuff is a service providing sale, rental, repair and customisation of a diverse range Mobility equipment, from a walking stick tip to a "Scripted" or "Made to Measure" manual wheelchair, also hoists, beds and more. We are small and diversified - that's what our clients want from a local supplier.

We employ three full time and two casual staff, all from our local community. Our customer base is predominately located in the North West quarter of Sydney. Our customers have a country town philosophy, they know us and they CHOOSE to deal with someone local.

I am a person with a severe physical disability, I acquired a spinal cord injury over 30 years ago. We employ people with a disability. We actively companied for the NDIS and participated in the "Every Australian Counts" campaign. Holding a "DisabilTee" in our showroom and I was interviewed on the NDIS for multiple articles in the local press.

I wish to make clear **I do not support a bulk procurement nor a national tender process**. Either proposal are too onerous, complex and difficult for small organisations such as us and would mean the death of my company, putting myself and my employees unemployed. The industry and my local customers would loose a combined AT experience exceeding 50 years.

Nor do I propose a completely open supply of AT to NDIA participants, I believe suppliers of AT should have an accreditation process. Ideally like what has proposed by the Assistive Technology Suppliers Australasia (ATSA)

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Implementation of a price surveillance system similar to what Medicare has implemented, will keep control of pricing irregularities.

Looking at a proposed bulk procurement or national tender process, from the view of a participant of the NDIA - as I will be one. I have a number of grave concerns:-

Most importantly as the NDIA is promoted to be all about choice, your proposal will limit the number of brands, products and outlets or suppliers. Not enabling participants choose their preferred product or supplier. Due to the very nature of AT it is an extremely personal piece of equipment. The process of selecting AT regularly requires the suppliers staff to be in very close quarters with the person with a disability and literally be "hands on" my body. Having to deal with a supplier because they have won a tender on financial issues or because they have the ability to provide volume has nothing to do with whom I CHOOSE to be touching and advising me. And if their supply and service is poor I cannot go else were, currently I have that choice and control.

I can openly choose my supplier of personal care, pharmacy, GP, specialist doctor and supplier of continence aids all with government subsidies or assistance. **But NOT when it comes to my provider of AT – WHY ?**

Personal care & the alike assistance is going to take over half of the NDIS funding and it is not proposed to have such a "closed shop" attitude to choice of suppliers. AT will be a small fraction of the NDIS budget, though the proposed system requires layers of bureaucracy and limits choice – why ?.

The proposed system will also stop the ability of the most recent "released" products being available immediately. Australians with a disability would have to wait on a tender cycle before being able to access new and improved products.

If I am fortunate enough that the product I want has been made available through your proposed process, as there will be a restricted number of suppliers, it will limit my choice. If I do not want to use the supplier chosen by your process, I cannot go else ware. Their staff may lack experience, knowledge or it could be as simple as incompatible personalities.

It will be down the winner of tender who has sufficient resources and over heads to fulfil the demands of a complex process. I will want to go to a supplier who has knowledge, experience and genuinely is interested in an outcome for me I expect it to be reasonably priced, necessary and good value.

The proposed system does not take into account. The current competitive, market specialist, retail supply system, which gives participants choice and control. A supplier, who does not provide reasonable price and good value, simply does not survive. Also not taken into account are participants will want to choose a supplier who knows them, who they most likely will have a history with and trust. That supplier will already have a wealth of informal knowledge about the



participant, which is of great value when selecting and advising on AT, particularly mid and high level needs in the AT pyramid.

Large companies with the resources capable to fulfilling a tender or bulk procurement process. Will reduce supply of AT to box shuffling and NOT provide the included services that are currently being provided by the AT industry.

The provision of AT in Australia is currently good value for money on an international level. The Queensland Competition Authority's 2014 report into AT pricing, stated - the Australian AT market is highly evolved and very competitive with prices on average 24% lower than those in other countries (QCA 2014, pg. 48), when delivery to Australia is taken into account.

The paper proposals will dramatically change the way AT is supplied throughout Australia. With less choice and control for participants and greater cost to the NDIA in the long run. When competition is wiped out and only a few large suppliers remain, the table will be turned on the NDIA and control over supply of AT will be held by a few multinational suppliers. Who will then control pricing as a duopoly or the like.

On a finishing note:-

I find it ironic that my staff and I actively campaigned for a NDIS to give people with a disability choice and control in their lives. We participated in the "Every Australian Counts" campaign. Holding a "DisabilTee" in our showroom. Attending public rallies and I was interviewed on the NDIS for multiple articles in the local press. The proposed system for AT provision will limit choice and control and make myself (a person with a disability) and my staff unemployed.

Ken Ferris

Manager