

20 March 2024

Hon. Bill Shorten, MP
Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme
By email minister.shorten@dss.gov.au

Penelope McKay
Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Market Stewardship and Home & Living Group
National Disability Insurance Scheme
By email penelope.mckay@ndis.gov.au

Re: Assistive Technology (AT) approval issues and extensive delays

Dear Minister Shorten and Deputy CEO McKay,

Further to conversations undertaken recently with senior NDIS staff, the undersigned peak bodies write to request consideration of support for our respective members whilst they await a pathway to the flow of AT approvals to address a 6–9-month delay in such approvals.

We understand that the delays result from both a lack of capacity within the NDIS to manage the load, and a ‘one-off’ error in process with regard to mid-range AT approvals, both of which are now being addressed. However, we have deep concern for both the participants for whom approvals are outstanding, in many cases their physical and psychological wellbeing being put at risk; and the businesses that supply the AT, as many - in particular small local businesses - are experiencing a significant decrease in cashflow leading to redundancies, and in some cases moving to a reduction in or closure of operations.

Our organisations are fielding calls and emails daily from members at risk and have attached a sample of these to highlight the stress participants and suppliers are both facing.

“My issue as a business owner is trying to maintain cashflow. We are consistently busy with completing trials and quotes which is a huge expense. I also have weekly wages and other general running costs. My salary and my wife’s salary has also been cut to try and help reduce expenses. The last NDIS approval we received was in November and very few approvals before then. I am now at a point where I reluctantly have to consider making some of my long term employees redundant.”

I understand NDIS have a process to rectify these issues and have triaged approvals based on participants at risk but have to ask if consideration has been made for businesses at risk. I am desperate to retain my employees, keep my doors open and make a difference to my clients lives by supplying their preferred AT equipment.”

“The current delays in funding approvals from the NDIA are not only significantly impacting the health, safety, mobility and community participation of many participants, but have also increased the financial pressures and raised staffing capacity concerns to many Prosthetic and Orthotic service providers around the country. To date this year, we have seen less than 10% of the funding approvals received in previous years and witnessing an ever-growing backlog of work with many of these requests now dating back 4 to 6 months. Once the approval backlogs are cleared there will be an unfeasible amount of work resulting from staff capacity restraints.

There appears to be little consideration on the impact these significant delays have on how providers will manage the ever growing financial and staffing pressures and the impact it is having on participant wellbeing. The overhead costs associated with running a Prosthetic and Orthotic Facility is significant and many service providers are beginning to feel a real financial strain.”

To this end, **we respectfully request an advancement of a small percentage of outstanding approval funds to AT providers ensuring they can remain in business and able to fulfill requests and provide AT supports when the backlog has been cleared.** This advancement will avoid the laying off of crucial staff and allow providers to continue providing necessary services without delay or restriction. The NDIA was able to support an advancement of funds to assist AT providers to stay in business during the unprecedented COVID period, and we believe a similar package would be of great benefit at this time.

We see this as imperative in ensuring that NDIS participants awaiting vital assistive technology are not put at additional risk or stress should their AT provider no longer be in business when approvals are finally released – requiring them to begin the process again and further delaying the delivery of this much needed equipment.

We thank you for your consideration of our request and welcome the opportunity to work with you to find a workable solution at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Serena Ovens
CEO
Assistive Technology Suppliers Australia



Jessica Landers
CEO
Australian Orthotic Prosthetic Association