

Briefing paper:

Improving access to assistive technology for people with disability who are excluded from the NDIS

What is assistive technology?

- The term ‘assistive technology’ (AT) refers to any aid, piece of equipment or home modification that helps someone overcome the impact of disability.
- Wheelchairs, ramps, electronic communication devices, prosthetic limbs and screen reading software are all examples of assistive technology.
- These solutions play a critical role in the lives of many people with disability, their family and Carers by:
 - ▶ Increasing independence and participation in everyday activities;
 - ▶ Reducing reliance on families and Carers, thereby improving personal relationships and minimising carer stress;
 - ▶ Minimising the onset of secondary health conditions;
 - ▶ Reducing the risk of accidents and falls;
 - ▶ Helping people to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible.

What is the problem?

- While the NDIS has the ability to fully fund the assistive technology that is needed by participants, this scheme was only ever intended to provide support to around 10% of people with disability across Australia.
- People with disability who are excluded from the NDIS still do not have equitable access to the assistive technology they need. They are commonly required to wait more than 12 months to access funding, self-fund some or all of the assistive technology they need or simply go without.

- While the amount of funding available is insufficient to meet current levels of demand, there are approximately 100 different assistive technology funding streams available outside the NDIS. This complex maze is very difficult for consumers to navigate. There is also no consistency between programs. The amount of funding an individual can access can vary greatly depending on their age, where they live, how and when their disability was acquired and which service system they fall under. Further information can be found at www.assistivetechforall.org.au.

What is the solution?

- A single, nationally consistent assistive technology program is needed to support people with disability who are excluded from the NDIS.
- This approach would:
 - ▶ Help ensure Australia is meeting its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
 - ▶ Align with the direction outlined in the final report from the Review of Assistive Technology Programs in Australia and recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety;
 - ▶ Reduce administrative burden on Governments;
 - ▶ Minimize downstream costs by reducing demand in other areas such as acute health and aged and community care;
 - ▶ Drive nationally consistent outcomes for consumers;
 - ▶ Simplify funding arrangements and streamline access for consumers;
 - ▶ Provide people with the assistive technology they need to lead better quality lives and maintain their connection in the community.

How can you help?

The Department of Social Services is currently in the process of finalising a new National Disability Strategy for 2020-2030. I'm asking you as my representative to contact Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston and ask her to make sure a fair and equal national assistive technology program is included in the new National Disability Strategy once and for all!