

5th August 2010

Disability Care and Support Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

Seating Dynamics is a business that for the last 20 years has supported, educated about, helped develop and distributed quality products for wheelchair users and others with physical challenges. We have 4 owners, 3 of whom are long term wheelchair users. We employ 8 people, including the mother of a quadriplegic and an Occupational Therapist. We distribute through a national network of dealers.

Many people with disabilities rely on timely access to a wide range of assistive technology (AT) that provides an opportunity for them to interact with people and their environment. Of course this contributes not only to their ability to live productive and meaningful lives, but also enhances their quality of life and the quality of life of those who are a part of their lives.

The existing, fragmented systems for funding equipment for Australians with disabilities are creating an inequality of delivery of equipment and services to people who need access to AT. The current situation is confusing and daunting for therapists, end users and suppliers. The varying goals of funding schemes means that there is no consistency in supply of equipment – for example one state will have the funding goal of getting the client functional in the home while another state will have the goal of enabling the client to be functional in the community and able to find employment. Obviously these two goals will have huge impact on what equipment the client will be eligible to receive.

The huge number of funding systems adds significant duplication of work that could well be consolidated under one system. This would save money in administration and delivery of services. The past few years has seen NSW undergoing a review of the PADP funding scheme. I shudder to think how much this process has cost. If every funding scheme in Australia is to undergo review processes such as this the cost to government of the reviews will far outweigh the cost of providing equipment. Stopping the duplication and inefficient use of resources will save the Australian Government a fortune and, if done well, should result in a more fair and reasonable delivery of AT equipment.

The implementation of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) must ensure that people with disabilities have simpler, more efficient and much faster access to appropriate AT. It must also ensure that businesses such as Seating Dynamics are able to continue to provide high quality, ethical service to those in need of AT. Without a robust, competitive and profitable industry, people with disabilities will suffer reduced choice, lower service levels and increased costs.

An effective AT funding component of the NDIS must include –

- A more efficient assessment process such as pre-approved funding. This in itself would save tens of millions of dollars at both government and business levels.
- An open and transparent process for evaluating equipment, ongoing AT equipment development and up to date research.
- Adequate levels of funding
- An overarching philosophy for the funding of AT equipment – eg. Provision of equipment to enable AT equipment users to live productive and meaningful lives in the home and community with a goal to enable paid employment where possible.
- An ongoing commitment to prevention of long term negative impact for those requiring AT equipment (eg. Prevention of shoulder injury, prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome, prevention of pressure related injury etc)
- A commitment to funding the servicing of equipment.
- An understanding of the role of suppliers and the overheads our industry carries in order to deliver assessment equipment, product expertise, education, speedy deliveries etc.
- A commitment to purchase of AT equipment which is TGA compliant or where applicable meets required standards.
- A streamlining of Australian Standards so that we are in line with accepted International Standards – at the moment many products need to be tested to Australian standards despite having met equivalent international standards resulting in overheads that are eventually passed onto consumers.

Seating Dynamics is also a member of the Independent Rehabilitation Suppliers Association and endorses their submission to the Productivity Commission to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Turnbull, Managing Director