

I have worked as an Occupational Therapist in the disability sector for 19 years. My work frequently involves assessing people with moderate to severe physical disabilities for the highly specialised equipment which is essential to their health and wellbeing and to enabling them to be as independent as possible within their communities- for example, motorised wheelchairs and scooters.

Following the assessment process I then prepare funding applications mainly to the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program for funding for the equipment selected to best meet my client's needs. This process is very slow with the Aids and Equipment Program frequently having long waiting lists for funding availability. In addition the funding available frequently does not cover the full cost of the equipment needed. There is then a further delay while I or the client's case manager (if they have one) seeks top up funds - often through charitable trusts. Most of my clients survive on a Disability Support Pension and do not have the resources to contribute to the cost of equipment which is often hugely expensive – for example a motorised wheelchair may cost \$15,000 of which only about two thirds will be funded by the Aids and Equipment Program.

The situation for those requiring home modification to enable them to continue to live in their own homes is even more difficult. The Victorian Aids and Equipment Program provides a subsidy over the lifetime of an individual with a disability of \$4,400 towards the cost of home modifications. Those familiar with building costs will realise that this sum will not achieve much. Items which are frequently required are wheelchair ramps, and extensive bathroom modifications to provide an accessible toilet and shower for those with mobility problems.

Accessing an Occupational Therapist is also difficult for many with long waitlist for funded services.

Frequently the person with a disability has to wait for months for an Occupational Therapy assessment, then wait again for months for funding approval to purchase the equipment. There is then a further delay when suppliers order or in many cases fabricate the equipment to meet the clients specific needs.

I see a National Disability Insurance Scheme as having the capacity to solve this problem for people with disabilities by providing timely access to the full cost of the equipment and home modifications which individuals require as well as funding for the assessment process.

It seems terribly unfair that the method by which one acquires a disability determines access to much needed funding. Those injured in car accidents can via TAC access speedy provision of support, where as those born with a disability have to wait – often for over a year for badly needed equipment.

In a society where all are considered to have equal value, surely this should be reflected by equal treatment?

The method of administering a National Disability Insurance Scheme I see as beyond my area of expertise to advise on. However the need for such a scheme is obvious to all of us either affected by disability or providing services for those affected.