



16 August 2010

Disability Care and Support
Productivity Commission
PO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Commissioners

We write in response to your Issues Paper of May 2010, and to make the Commission aware of applied research work that we believe offers a more balanced perspective on economically evaluating enablers for people with disabilities.

In 2006, a multidisciplinary group of professionals and researchers working in the field of assistive technology and universal design teamed up with economists from the University of Western Sydney in what became known as 'The Fremantle Collaboration.' The group gained a Research Partnerships Program Grant to investigate the economic framework for people with a disability and the provision of specialist equipment for their needs, with the assistance of the Independent Living Centres of Australia and Novita Children's Services Inc.

Details of the work are available on the group's website: www.at.org.au and a good summary of the foundations of this approach, using a practical case study, has recently been published online. The abstract of the book chapter is attached.

The Collaboration continues work exploring a range of the economic issues, and potential tools, surrounding the effective use of assistive technology and other enablers, and adoption of universal design. Currently three of the group are well progressed in PhD applied research based on these foundations, and we continue to work with our international collaborators on incorporating developments here and internationally into the framework.

We would be happy to provide the Commission with a more detailed overview of the application of this work in assessing whole of life evaluations (from an economic point of view), as well as some of the most current findings of specific studies.

We look forward to your interim report.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lloyd Walker.

Economics of Inclusiveness: Can We as a Society Afford Not to Provide Assistive Technology or Use Universal Design?

Desleight de Jonge, Ingrid Schraner

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Abstract:

This chapter uses a person-centred approach to develop an inclusive society and related economic analyses. It develops a new kind of cost-effectiveness analysis that can encompass individual situations. To do so, this chapter uses the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) in a novel way. Traditionally, people with disabilities have been excluded from environments and activities by exclusionary design practices and limited access to recent technological developments. The cost of including people with disabilities has thus been conceptualised in terms of the additional expenses for specialized technologies and modified environments. However, little attention has been given to the costs and outcomes of the existing exclusionary design practices and possible wastage of resources.

Building on previous work, this chapter uses the ICF's concepts of activities and participation to identify effectiveness, and the ICF's concepts of environmental factors to identify the relevant costs. Such a cost-effectiveness analysis compares a particular person's current situation, which includes providing the currently available assistive technology (AT) in an exclusionary environment, with a hypothetical optimal situation. This optimal situation is conceptualized within the framework of current technological possibilities and the person's individual requirements. It includes the following two sub-situations: one in which a person is provided with an optimal AT system in the existing exclusionary environment and another in a universally designed environment with a corresponding AT system. The chapter uses an illustrative case to compare activities and participation achieved in both situations, and calculates the real costs that would result in an Australian town.