



Amputees & Families Support Group Qld Inc.

ABN: 93 767 990 911

55 Cinderella Drive, Springwood
PO Box 848 Springwood Qld 4127

Phone: 07 3290 4293
Mobile: 0438 004 465
Fax: 07 3290 3485
E-mail: admin@afsg.org.au
www.afsg.org.au

PROSTHETICS

The commission considers that NDIS should fund artificial limbs and mobility aides.

Management of the Amputees and Families Support Group QLD Inc (AFSGQ) wishes to congratulate the NDIS Commission for having open forums and accepting comments and feedback from people with disabilities and those working with people with disabilities.

AFSGQ is a self help support group which supports amputees throughout Queensland, also working with groups in other states to bring about an equitable service to amputees all over Australia.

The fact that there is no equality throughout the country; Queensland currently receives much less funding than other states within Australia to provide limbs to the amputee community. Funding hasn't increased in 15 years for the provision of artificial limbs and Australian amputees are receiving products equal to third world country standards.

We would expect that under the NDIS high end prosthetic components like C-Legs, Flex Feet, Rotators and Myo electric arms etc. will be supplied and fitted. This expectation is mirrored by other amputee organisations throughout Australia including amputee support groups in Cairns (QLD), Mackay (QLD), Toowoomba (QLD) and Limbs 4 Life (VIC).

Items provided under the NDIS would be individually tailored to the needs of the wearer. As an amputee's needs fluctuates with age, ability, experience, lifestyle, mobility etc., funding will need to be flexible to cater for these variables. The ongoing cost of items required by an amputee such as stump socks, limb components and other medical and mobility aides will not always be the same price. Funds set aside to provide prosthetics has the potential to be wasted on products that are not suitable for the wearer. Concern stems from working with amputees with first hand / foot knowledge of how difficult it is to get a prosthesis which fits correctly, is comfortable, suitable for their needs and is not going to fall apart or need repairs within the first six months.

When speaking to Robyn Scanlon (an amputee in QLD) today, Robyn shared that when she started having her limbs made, *'they were crafted by ex-service amputees that just knew how to make a decent limb that was comfortable, durable and lasted a long time (often lasting 8-10 years).'* There is a genuine need for more hands on experience for new workers in prosthetic services to improve in this area so funds are not squandered on trying to get it right.

Currently Queensland amputees are serviced by a handful of very experienced prosthetists but they are approaching retirement age and want to make sure the amputee community will receive quality prosthetics once they have retired.



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Unfortunately, members of amputee support groups throughout Queensland have grave fears that they won't have craftsmen making their limbs; rather they will have people that have been trained to have a career making their limbs. This refers to graduates of the Latrobe University in Victoria, who have very very minimal hands on experience once they leave the university.

In 2006, amputees groups throughout Queensland were united in trying to have an alternative training regime similar to an apprenticeship put into place. General consensus across the board is that a true craftsman doesn't need to have a piece of paper to make an excellent limb, hands on experience will always outweigh what is learnt in books. A person who has worked alongside a prothetists for years wanting to obtain their qualification as a Prothetist should not have to uproot his family and move to Melbourne just to attend the Latrobe University to get the piece of paper.

A draft proposal was compiled by Jenny Knitz from the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Physiotherapy, St Lucia University in Queensland which was forwarded to AFSGQ patron Miss Barbara Stone MP, State Member for Springwood, who forwarded it to the Department of Education and Training but it fell into a black hole and has not surfaced yet.

The first hurdle came in the form of how the occupation was marketed. Prosthetic and Orthotics is promoted as a career instead of a trade. A more glamorous title that comes with less hands on experience, less expertise and less firsthand knowledge working with consumers, materials and components needed to product a quality product for an amputee.

As part of the commission looks at service delivery and fund management, it is obvious that something needs to happen to train and qualify craftsmen/women to replace aging prothetists as they retire. We stand united in our belief that the only way to train a Prothetist is to have them involved in the industry, working alongside experienced prothetists from day one.

Cossette Urbani
State Coordinator
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VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

The Commission is proposing that NDIS funding for vehicle modification to allow people with disabilities to drive.

The Amputees and Families Support Group QLD INC (AFSGQ) supports the proposal that vehicle modifications would be provided under the NDIS. AFSGQ would also support a proposal to train people in the use of the modifications; along with testing an amputees driving capacity prior to applying the modifications to vehicles to ascertain if modifications are indeed essential.

It is a costly exercise to have a vehicle modified but it will out way the cost of not having a vehicle modified. As explained at the Brisbane forum- *In New Zealand they looked at the cost of providing an attendant and a modified taxi to allow people access doctors' appointments and normal things, shopping and going out once a week, and compared that to the cost of vehicle modifications and the cost of training people to use modified vehicles.* In some cases it would be cheaper to modify the vehicles and provide greater independence than to provide subsidised taxis.

There is a need to look closer at the rules behind modifying vehicles for amputees. Currently anyone with a left leg amputee can drive an automatic with no modifications; a right leg amputee can only drive an automatic vehicle with a left foot accelerator modification; a double amputee has to have hand controls. None of these can operate a manual vehicle.

We echo the concern of the Amputee Advisory Association Sunshine Coast Inc. (QLD) in regards to a person whose employment requires them to operate a vehicle such as a mechanic or truck driver. Having to modify all vehicles before these amputees are able to drive them would eliminate their employability; as an example a motor mechanic who has to drive many vehicles. If they can't handle them then they lose their job. A truck driver might have to operate a vehicle with both clutch and brake.

Many amputees drive with their prosthesis and completely ignore the modifications. Each amputee should be tested after their amputation to gauge their capability; if it is found that no modifications are required, they should be given their open licence and not need to have unnecessary vehicle modifications.

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