



strokefoundation

3 March 2015

Attention: Mary Hawkins
National Disability Insurance Agency
GPO Box 700
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By email: engagement@ndis.gov.au

To whom it may concern

Re: Assistive Technology discussion paper

The National Stroke Foundation (NSF) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed **assistive technology framework** as outlined in the assistive technology discussion paper paper. For any queries on this submission please contact NSF Policy and Advocacy Director Rebecca Smith on rsmith@strokefoundation.com.au or 03 9918 7217.

This submission will provide comment on the questions as requested by the NDIA at <http://www.ndis.gov.au/document/1286>.

- **Do you think the participant capacity building framework (Attachment 2) will help participants reach their own decisions and give them better control over choices about assistive technology solutions?**

The NSF supports this approach and welcomes the opportunity for stroke survivors to have more control over the choices they make for assistive technology. However, the NSF would like to stress that the majority of stroke survivors will be experiencing stroke and other disabilities for the first time and therefore should be placed in the Novice category and be provided the appropriate level of support.

- **How useful would it be to have access to peer support people, such as Assistive Technology Mentors?**

The NSF supports and endorses the introduction of assistive technology mentors. In response to the experience and knowledge of the mentors, the NSF advocates that all stroke survivors are assisted by mentors that have worked with stroke survivors in the past and understand the many complex needs that stroke survivors have.

To put the complex needs of stroke survivors in perspective, a survey of stroke survivors was conducted to determine what needs they had following a stroke and whether those needs were met or not. The most common health problems reported by stroke survivors were mobility problems (74%) and 'hidden' problems such as fatigue (67%), emotional

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(59%), memory (59%) and concentration problems (59%). All these needs can be addressed with the aid of assistive technology.¹

- **How important do you think “expert advisers” will be in assisting with assistive technology solutions and decision-making? What are the main skills and attributes you think they should have?**

As stated above, the complex needs of stroke survivors require the skills and expertise of expert advisers that have considerable experience working with stroke survivors and understand their needs from a holistic perspective. As stated above, stroke survivors have many hidden problems such as cognitive issues that are difficult to diagnose without specialist expertise in stroke.

- **Provide suggestions for processes and/or activities to ensure that assistive technology solutions are identified correctly, with minimal error, and are effective in supporting participants to achieve their goals.**

The NSF suggests that, for stroke survivors, assistive technology solutions be in line with technology recommended by allied health members experienced with working with stroke survivors. The NSF would like to also recommend that stroke survivors have adequate access to allied health professionals to facilitate this process and to ensure that solutions are provided as quickly as possible.

The NSF welcomes the opportunity to provide input into assistive technology for stroke survivors where practicable.

- **What do you think of the acquisition and procurement approach (including having a third party entity manage the pricing sourcing and procurement arrangements and contracted supply agreements)?**

The NSF does not have an opinion on acquisition or procurement, save the financial impact on stroke survivors. The NSF welcomes the opportunity for stroke survivors to receive cheaper technology, provided it conforms to the required standards.

- **What do you think about the use of refurbished items (assuming that all appropriate health and safety procedures and necessary safeguards will be in place)?**

The NSF has no issue with refurbishing items – indeed it welcomes the option if it means more stroke survivors have better and faster access to assistive technology. However the NSF reaffirms its position that all refurbished items must be fit for purpose and in ‘as new’ condition.

¹ The needs of stroke survivors in Australia. National Stroke Foundation. September 2013

When making a choice of assistive technology for stroke survivors the focus must always be on what the best technology solution is and then which piece of equipment available is best able to deliver that technological solution. The use of refurbished items should not be in place of more suitable equipment that is also available.

- **In what ways could further innovation be introduced and explored so that NDIA participants can have access to the best and brightest technical solutions?**

There have been many advancements in assistive technology worldwide. The NSF recommends the NDIA maintain links with relevant organisations, both domestic and international, to keep abreast of latest developments. The NSF recommends the NDIA take advantage of the established networks of non-government organisations working in related fields and leverage off their expertise. The NDIS should also engage regularly with users of assistive technology, particularly in determining where current technology is not meeting their needs and requires improvement.

Innovation can be 'high tech' or 'low tech'. Stroke survivors may be assisted by computers that have special programs that speak for people with severe aphasia or who can communicate only by eye blinks. At the other end of the technology spectrum, the innovative use of Velcro and special clasps may assist stroke survivors to dress themselves and assist in holding their clothing together. These advancements are not always well communicated internationally outside of the immediate health profession. The NDIA is well advised to tap into the many networks of non-government organisations working in this space.

The NSF would like to reiterate that stroke survivors have many complex needs that can be met through the use of assistive technology both for day to day living, as well as to maintain their recovery from stroke.

In addition to the above feedback, the NSF would also like to raise the issue of people under the age of 65 with a disability living in aged care residential facilities. The NSF is unsure of the eligibility of these people to access assistive technology through the NDIS and welcomes any response and further information.

Yours Sincerely



Dr Erin Lalor
Chief Executive Officer