



Submission in response to:

**Joint Standing Committee on the National
Disability Insurance Scheme**

NDIS Planning Inquiry

Additional Information post Hearing;

8th October Brisbane 2019

21st October 2019

CONTACT

David Sinclair, Executive Officer

ATSA

PO Box 7245, TATHRA NSW 2550

(02) 8006-7357

info@atsa.org.au

Information request from the Committee

Assistive Technology Suppliers Australia (ATSA) attended the Brisbane hearing of the Committee on the 8th of October 2019 at 10am.

The Committee requested examples of NDIS participant repairs that were carried out in good faith and payments either took time or have not been made, post the work been carried out.

ATSA approached some of its members to provide feedback to this question, with the following responses;

1. In most cases now, the business is advising customers to hang onto their device (partially working or not working) until they have confirmed they have funds available for repair from the NDIA. This stage can take 1-2 weeks for Plan Managed and longer for NDIS managed. This adds time to the repair process that was not previously an issue. The state-based agencies either funded or declined within 1-3 days. (Except QLD that could be up to 7 days).
2. Self and plan managed participants appear to have the easiest pathway/flexibility to access funds for repairs and maintenance.
3. A Plan Managed participant can experience additional time waiting for a repair as the supplier of the repairs, has to wait for allocated funds to arrive before work can commence. This generally adds up to 1 week. Agency managed if everything works OK in portal is quicker – 1-2 days.
4. Funding for repairs is no longer logical/best economic based and decisions are more around funds available in current plan. E.g. An Allora2 communication device, requiring \$600 worth of general repairs was denied but NDIS approved its replacement of \$7000. What appears to have taken place since the introduction of the NDIS is the loss of the application of common sense and listening to the person who knows the equipment, value and what is a reasonable repair.
5. One ATSA member stated that some repairs take extended periods of time for approval when participants are advised by NDIS to wait until their Plan Review to add the funding to their budget. E.g. 3 months or longer. Our business has been forced to hold the device or not commence the repairs unless funding is available due to issues early in the NDIS roll out. Sadly, at times this has greatly affected the participant as they wait for funding approvals, however we cannot take the financial risk. We have had 3 devices spend +3months waiting for funding after the repair has been completed or at least evaluated on what is needed.
6. Positive change – more participants have access to funding to hire a replacement during repair and more participants are funded to have a backup system maintained.

7. Positive change – more expensive repairs are getting funded (eventually) where previous state-based agencies wouldn't have. E.g. QLD participants now can get screens repaired.
8. One business had 7 incidences in 2018 where they have still been unable to collect the funds from the individual Participant's NDIS plan equalling \$2428.57. Due to the long-standing history of not receiving payment from NDIS for 100's of transactions since the scheme started, the business has instigated the policy, that the Participant's plan must be checked for available funds prior to any repairs taking place.

Participant Number	Participant Name	Document Date	Amount Owed
43026....	BRIAN xxxxx	17/05/2018	\$224.31
43035....	RUDY xxxxx	4/05/2018	\$149.60
43044....	CATHLEEN xxxxx	14/03/2018	\$149.60
43030....	BRETT xxxxx	12/04/2018	\$297.80
43039....	LEANNE xxxxx	4/05/2018	\$1,093.00
43001....	NDIS	26/04/2018	\$364.66
43024....	Donald xxxxxx	23/03/2018	\$149.60
		Total	\$2428.57

9. Another member of ATSA stated that of recent times there has been few incidences since the new NDIA policy came into place mid-2019, which automatically allocated funding for equipment repair & maintenance. The only time this can still be a problem is where the repair is over the amount allocated for repairs in "consumable" then a quote is required to be approved by NDIS, alternately the Participant either has to fund themselves or wait for the repair.
10. A mother of a participant pursued a purchase for a second-hand stroller as the participant was declined a new unit and was directed to wait until the next plan. When she located one for \$300, she phoned the business who originally sold the unit to request a quote for a service that would include parts.

There was no repairs and maintenance in her son's plan, however there was approximately \$3,000.00 available in his Consumable budget. The mother's intention was to use these funds for the second-hand stroller along with its service and repairs. The son's plan had approximately 10 days left in his plan therefore it was believed there was enough time for the quote to be finalised.

The quote for the parts was issued to the Mum, stating the total costings of the parts and service breakdown prices. She was super excited and authorised the business to proceed with the Service Booking under her sons' Consumable budget.

When the business attempted to process the Quote total under his Consumable budget her son's plan had been cut short, roughly 7 days and a new plan had already commenced. The mother was not notified of this and still had not received a copy of her son's new plan. She was extremely upset, and she travelled from Brisbane for us to do the minimum service of her sons acquired stroller as NDIA only had funded \$300.00 under his new Consumable budget. She had lost access to the \$3,000. She was also advised that if she received a receipt for the stroller of \$300, she could receive a reimbursement from NDIA. Sadly, as her son's plan was set up as Agency Managed there is no facility to do this, however it is understood that if she was Self-Managed, she could. If this

Mum were to wait for NDIA to approve a NEW stroller in her son's new plan it would have cost the scheme approx. \$5,500. Technically she had saved the scheme approx. \$5,000 in funding by purchasing a second-hand Stroller.

The scheme ruling should not discriminate funding by how a plan is set up. If a participant is Agency Managed why are they unable to purchase second-hand equipment in the scheme? Whereas Self-Managed participants can? Suggestion: The Scheme should consider emergency funding for second-hand equipment as in the long run this is saving a lot of unnecessary funding within the scheme.

11. Another case is where a Mum had repairs and maintenance in her daughter's plan, but as it was so low and not enough funding for the range of devices the child used. The budget was called on to cover a repair for one piece of equipment. When the wheel on her daughter's walker required to be replaced, sadly there was no funding left. The business carried out the repair as this was an extreme emergency as she was unable to attend school without her walker. As there was no funding, the business elected to action the repair, service and travel free of charge as it was an urgent matter plus it would have disadvantaged the child due to the system. The cost to the business was approximately \$297. The cost to chase the money from the NDIA would have been greater than the value recovered, this should not be the case, unfortunately it is the reality.

This circumstance highlights how businesses are placed in difficult moral situations due to the system failures of the NDIS repair and maintenance structures.

12. A business recently carried out a repair for a Walker which was paid for under an AT repair budget. Mum phoned and required another repair on the same piece of equipment which there was no funding left and was told you could only use repairs once per plan, per piece of equipment. She was forced to have this repaired by a technician, and as a result was out of pocket.

Again, an example of a disconnect between the real world and structured rules. No one plans to have an equipment failure. Therefore, there is a need for understanding, flexibility to deal with the circumstances at hand in a timely manner, to remove disadvantage for the person who greatly relies on AT.

Recommendation

There is clearly a gap in the management of urgent repairs. If funds are not available, and the participant is not self-managed then they are in a highly vulnerable situation.

ATSA respects that planning for the unknown is difficult plus placing large sums of money "for the just in case" in a participant's plan may not be wise use of Government funds.

However, the welfare of the participant must be front of mind when things go wrong. Therefore, it is clear there is a need for a system that the NDIS participant can get authorisation for urgent repairs for life essential AT within hours. This will enable the supplier of the repairs to act in confidence that they will not be left having to chase payment.