

Executive Summary

Utilisation of expert reports

A fundamental aspect of how the Agency interacts with Allied Health professionals in this space is trust. Over the course of numerous inquiries the committee has heard repeated evidence of what can only be described as the development of a culture of mistrust of participants and their needs. The evidence the committee heard in this inquiry around how formal clinical reports and expert opinions of Allied Health professionals are discounted, or second guessed, in favour of either those of the planners, or presumably in favour of other Allied Health professionals without specific knowledge of the case on an 'expert panel'.

Given the evidence received, the committee is of the view that there should be a presumption in favour of accepting the advice from appropriate experts.

Accreditation for AT professionals

The committee welcomes the continuous efforts of the agency to improve the capability of its decision makers. However, it is at a loss to understand why the Agency has not utilised the expertise and experience of state and territory systems. The credentialing model employed by SWEP in Victoria seems to offer a robust, logical, cost effective, equitable, and efficient system for ensuring the best possible outcomes for both participants and funding bodies. The committee strenuously suggests that the Agency does not re-invent the wheel yet again by attempting to design a model with all the features of the models in place before the Scheme rolled out, but with much worse outcomes for all stakeholders, including tax payers.

Interaction with state and territory systems

The committee heard compelling evidence on the efficiency of the operation of AT equipment services in states and territories prior to the NDIS. The time periods between the necessary equipment being identified, provided, and used appropriately and safely, have blown out significantly under the NDIS.

The current situation is unworkable, and is producing unacceptable delays. The Agency has to decide on one process or the other. Given the experience, skills and expertise of the state schemes, the committee suggests that the Agency enter into agreements, or Memorandums of Understanding with them to process and manage applications instead of the Agency.

Loan pools and recycling of AT equipment

Loan pools, recycling, and refurbishment of assistive technology have long since been a feature of any aids and equipment programs. The NDIS model, with an emphasis on an individual bespoke solution for each participant, does not sit easily within those previous systems.

However, not every AT solution is a fully customised piece of technology that can only be utilised by its intended recipient. There are thousands of standard items that the committee heard were being purchased at high cost, on an individual basis, and not being recycled or re-used afterwards. Evidence to the inquiry suggests that there are

improvements and efficiencies possible across the board, on processes and procedures, as well as significant cost saving opportunities.

Tracking AT applications

All submitters, including the Agency itself, agree that the ability to track the progress of an AT request would assist everyone. It is a basic requirement, and the committee welcomes steps taken by the Agency to incorporate it into the *myplace* portal. It will also provide valuable data which will assist the Agency in providing further improvement to the AT process at a systemic level, while alleviating some stress on participants that a lack, or inconsistency of information brings. The committee will monitor the introduction of the capability with interest.

The need for KPIs

The committee heard that it can take months, even years in some cases, to receive requested equipment or devices. Delays for AT placement can have profound effects on the development of young children, those who require prosthetics or orthotics, and those with degenerative conditions. The committee welcomes steps taken by the Agency to address delays, however, it is of the view that the Agency should set KPIs for the length of time in which staff must consider and process applications.