

Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association Inc.



arata

participation through technology

24th January 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association (ARATA) is a national organisation established in 1993. Members include assistive technology (AT) practitioners (occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, rehabilitation engineers, etc.); AT suppliers and consumers.

ARATA is committed to ensuring that the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides AT that achieves good outcomes for consumers that are timely, efficient and affordable. Assistive technologies, home and vehicle modifications are vital and cost-effective strategies for minimising barriers and enabling a wide range of outcomes. These include autonomy and independence in activities in the home, getting out and about in the community, communicating with others, and participation in education and employment and community activities.

ARATA's NDIS Policy Statement is also attached. Whilst not directly addressing the legislation, this document provides useful background on AT in relation to the NDIS.

ARATA commends the inclusion of clear objectives and principles that put sound outcomes for people with disability first. This must remain a critical consideration in the development of the NDIS. ARATA also strongly supports the need for an innovative and outcomes focused approach that is sustainable, recognising the significant economic benefit to the Australian economy that that was identified by the Productivity Commission.

ARATA proposes that discretion be given to the NDIA CEO to allow entry to some people over the age of 65 who acquire a disability best served by the systems and services of the NDIS. In particular we would consider those with spinal cord injury or other traumatic injuries are often quite healthy at the time of their injury and, like most people with disability, could expect a period of healthy ageing if they receive the appropriate supports to meet their needs and goals.

ARATA endorses the need for the NDIS to consider early intervention, and encourage strategies that assist those people with disability who need episodic support e.g. active people who may need replacement prosthetics, vision equipment or other AT every few years, but who otherwise are fully independent. We trust Section 24 would reflect this understanding of disability. As ARATA has proposed (see www.arata.org.au/NDIS), a single national AT program will generate the most effective use of resources, both financial and human.

ARATA believes it is important for the NDIS to develop, implement and maintain a system to reuse AT, where and when appropriate, as it can be more cost-effective to clean, service and re-issue AT. Particularly if it is relatively expensive equipment such as power wheelchairs, environment control systems, communication devices, electric beds, mobility

hoists, pressure relieving cushions and mattresses as well as a variety of AT used for motor vehicle modifications. For example, a \$25,000-\$30,000 power wheelchair with custom seating that may have had little use and remains in good condition could have a new seating system installed on it at a fraction of the cost of supplying a new power wheelchair.

ARATA welcomes the framing of supports around a participant centred plan. It is encouraging to see such emphasis on empowering the participant in setting their goals and directing where possible the interventions that follow. ARATA firmly supports the need for evaluating all interventions against aims and goals established by the consumer.

ARATA is currently working with the Assistive Technology Suppliers of Australia (ATSA) on a Practical Design Funded project to recommend the ways forward in accrediting assessors, prescribers and providers in the AT sector. As this technology will be a substantial investment by the NDIS in the lives of people with disability, we look forward to working with the NDIS Transition Authority in developing those elements foreshadowed under Chapter 3, Part 3.

ARATA endorses the approach planned for selecting NDIA Board Members in line with the skills outlined in Chapter 6 Part 2. It is also heartened to see the plan to establish an Advisory Committee drawn from people with expertise in a range of relevant aspects highly relevant to the effective operation of the NDIS.

In particular we note that it is recommended that “at least one of the members is a person who has skills, experience or knowledge in the supply of equipment, OR the provision of services, to people with disability”. ARATA proposes that since AT is an important enabler which will constitute a substantial part of the NDIS budget, that BOTH persons with skill, experience or knowledge of the supply of equipment AND the provision of AT support services be represented. These are related but vastly different perspectives and much will be lost if only one is presented. Naturally ARATA recognises (through our membership) that some people who meet the criterion as a person with a disability (or a carer) also bring skills in the ‘supply of equipment.’ Hopefully with time this will continue to increase.

ARATA commends to all members of the Parliament this legislation as the first stages of offering a new and improved future for Australian’s with a disability. ARATA would welcome an opportunity to appear before Senate members at a suitable public hearing to talk further about the key place assistive technology will have in the lives of people with disability participating in the NDIS.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NDIS Draft Legislation and I look forward to speaking with you further. ARATA would welcome the opportunity to present at the upcoming public hearings regarding these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Cheryl Jones – President
Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association (ARATA)