Multiple Sclerosis Australia (MSA) Position: “People affected by MS who require the support of aids and equipment should have timely and cost effective access to enable them to maintain optimal mobility, independence and support with minimal disruption”.

Recommendations

A national aids and equipment reform agenda is needed to enable people to live full lives in an inclusive society. MSA lobbies to address the ongoing failures of existing programs to deliver an ‘end-to-end’ aids and equipment program, and to facilitate the transition to full implementation of the NDIS.

MSA suggests that the key elements of such a national aids and equipment agenda should include:

1. A national purchasing, distribution and recycling framework across all aids and equipment programs that aligns existing schemes and supports and complements the NDIS. This framework should address the provision of information, effective assessment incorporating individual requirements, choices and preferences, referral, prescription, supply and training, maintenance, replacement and recycling as well as research and development;

2. A commitment to no waiting under the NDIS, especially for people under the age of 18;

3. Consideration of a PBS-style aids and equipment prescription system to support and complement the NDIS;

4. Development of key linkages between aids and equipment provided under NDIS and that provided through related health, rehabilitation and aged care systems, especially for young people in nursing homes and residential aged care;

5. Initiation of an industry development plan for an Australian aids and equipment manufacturing industry as most equipment is imported. The plan should address the development of an effective supply chain, a skilled and available workforce, a focus on equipment standards and the credentialing of service providers;

6. The capacity to bulk purchase aids and equipment and related services on a national scale would enable NDIS to achieve some efficiency.
Discussion

One in ten Australians utilise aids and equipment. Most people with severe and profound disabilities require access to aids and equipment.

Aids and equipment can include a very wide range of items such as crutches, wheelchairs, pressure mattresses, hoists, communication aids, smart-home technology and vehicle and home modifications.

There are currently a multiplicity of different aids and equipment funding schemes across Australia resulting in duplication, fragmentation and coverage gaps.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will help people with severe and profound disabilities live full lives in an inclusive society because it will enable better access to vital aids and equipment.

The report of “A Needs Analysis of Australians With MS” (a detailed study to assess the needs of people with MS prepared by Deakin University in collaboration with MS Research dated November 2012) stated that “there was a wide range of equipment that participants indicated that they needed, but did not have (most particularly heating and cooling) as well as equipment that they could not afford (e.g. car modifications).”

The following table was included in the report.

Table 22. The percentage of people who require various types of equipment that they do not currently have, and the percentage of those people who cannot afford it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Need but don’t have</th>
<th>Can’t afford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility aids</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-related aids</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continence aids</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home modifications to assist with mobility</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home modifications to assist with personal care</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car modifications</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other equipment (e.g. lifting aids, special beds)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating or cooling</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 McCabe M., A Needs Analysis of Australians with MS, November 2012, page 42.
2 McCabe M., A Needs Analysis of Australians with MS, November 2012, page 42.
The study made the following recommendation regarding aids and equipment:

“6.4 Environmental Needs (Equipment and Transport)

a) It is recommended that people with MS receive greater financial assistance to allow them access to equipment and/or modifications that they currently need, but cannot afford. This includes the following types of equipment/modifications: Mobility aids,
b) computer related aids, home modifications, heating and cooling, and car modifications.
c) Larger pieces of equipment appear to be too expensive for participants.”

(More information regarding heating and cooling can be found in the MSA National Position Statement regarding Energy Costs.)

About Multiple Sclerosis Australia (MSA)

MSA is the national peak body for people living with MS in Australia. Our role is to work on behalf of all state and territory based member organisations to provide a voice for people living with multiple sclerosis across the country to support the development of:

- Research
- Advocacy and Awareness
- Communication and Information
- Services provided by our member organisations
- International Collaboration

MSA advocates across all stakeholders, governments and communities, on behalf of our members, to represent people who are diagnosed with the disease, their carers and the broader MS Community.

Contact us:

For more information you can contact MSA at info@msaustralia.org.au or call (02) 8484 1315

Reference; Multiple Sclerosis International Foundation’s (MSIF) Quality of Life Principle: Principle 1, regarding; Independence and Empowerment

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3 McCabe M., A Needs Analysis of Australians with MS, November 2012, page 123.