

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

## FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSISTING PARTICIPANTS TO DEVELOP THEIR NDIS PLANS

*This information sheet was developed by NCOSS in collaboration with members of the Assistive Technology Community Alliance of NSW (ATCAN). It is directed at Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and NDIS planners, guiding them to consider all factors relevant to a person's assistive technology (AT) needs when helping them develop their NDIS plans.*

Assistive technology (AT) is any device, system or design, that allows an individual to perform a task that they would otherwise be unable to do, or increase the ease and safety with which a task can be performed, or anything that assists individuals to carry-out daily activities.<sup>1</sup>

Many types of AT can form part of a person's reasonable and necessary supports under the NDIS. AT can vary in complexity, from everyday items like a walking stick (unlikely to be covered by the NDIS) to simple items like shower chairs, to complex items like customised wheelchairs.

If a person uses complex AT, this will need to be maintained and repaired, and the person may need professional assessment before selecting a new device. These considerations should be discussed with the person, so that the full costs of their AT needs are factored into their NDIS plan.

Below are suggested prompts to help planners and LACs ensure all relevant factors are covered:

### Maintenance and repair costs for complex AT

**How often does the AT need to be serviced? (this information can be sourced from the participant, professionals or AT suppliers).**

The costs of regular servicing needs to be included in the person's plan.

**What is the cost of emergency repairs – including call-outs?**

Costs of repairs should be factored into a person's plan in proportion to the age of the AT, with more money allocated for repair of older AT. Once a reasonable cost of repairs is calculated, a 'buffer' should be added in case the AT needs more repair than expected.

The additional costs of repair of core AT after

hours or on weekends also needs to be factored into participant's plans. 'Core AT' is crucial to a person's life and includes electric wheelchairs and beds, and alternating air pressure mattresses.

### How old is the AT?

**Ask the person how old the AT is. If it is nearing the end of its reasonable lifecycle, planning for a new device may be cheaper than maintenance.**

A 'reasonable lifecycle will depend on how often the person uses the AT, and what it is used for. For example, customised, lightweight manual wheelchairs for active users are likely to have a shorter lifecycle than a manual wheelchair a person uses as back-up when their electric wheelchair breaks down.

1. [Independent Living Centres Australia](#)

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Of course, the lifecycle must be considered in the context of a person's disability needs. If AT is no longer suitable for a person, it should be changed regardless of its age.

There might be a need for back up AT for important items. For example, it might be advisable for a person to plan for a new electric wheelchair when their new wheelchair is midway through its expected lifecycle so they will be covered as their current wheelchair deteriorates.

### Costs of assessment for new AT

If a person will shortly be needing new complex AT, they will require assessment by allied health professionals. These costs must be factored into their NDIS plan along with the costs of an AT supplier performing a trial.

Allied health professionals will assist the person to trial different devices. Associated costs which need to be factored in to a person's plan include:

- Allied health professional's time (measured hourly) for assessing the person, and sourcing devices to trial;
- Costs of transporting devices for trial; and
- AT supplier costs for the trial.

### Recreational use of AT

**Ask a person about their interests and talk about how AT can be used to help them further these interests.**

Examples of AT which can assist with recreation include:

- Modified play equipment or gardening tools
- A basketball, track or beach wheelchair
- A modified cycle

## ATCAN Members

The members of ATCAN include:

- Assistive Technology Suppliers Australia
- Cerebral Palsy Alliance
- First People's Disability Network
- Greystanes Disability Services
- Independent Living Centre NSW
- Northcott Disability Services
- NSW Council of Social Service
- People with Disability Australia Inc
- Physical Disability Council NSW
- Spinal Cord Injuries Australia
- The Lymphoedema Action Alliance
- Vision Australia