Assistive Technology for older Australians with vision loss



Fund a national, harmonised scheme to provide Assistive Technology to older Australians with disabilities including vision loss.

There are around 200,000 Australians over the age of 65 who are blind or have significant low vision. These people can often remain independent and continue living safely at home through the provision of a variety of Assistive Technology (AT).

For mild vision loss, relatively low-cost optical magnifiers can allow people to, for example, read medication labels, food expiry dates, and essential correspondence independently.

For more significant vision loss, use of specialised software to read screens, portable equipment that speaks printed material, and mobility aids can enable people who are blind or have low vision to safely leave their homes.

But currently, people outside the NDIS are missing out on this vital equipment, leading to higher risk of falls, hip fractures, and entry into residential care. This is because:

- The current Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and residential care system settings don't provide sufficient funding for AT;
- Long waiting lists for Home Care packages often make them inefficient for delivering AT;
- The 65 state/territory based AT programs are difficult to navigate for both consumers and service providers and provide inconsistent levels of funding and equipment.

The introduction of AT in early vision loss significantly reduces the risk of adverse outcomes and is a good return of investment – with every dollar spent returning between $3.90 and $25.63[1].

Vision 2020 Australia welcomes the inclusion of the importance of people with disability being supported to access assistive technology in Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031. We add our voice to the **Assistive Technology for All** campaign and support the call for the introduction of a nationally consistent, harmonised scheme to deliver AT to people who are blind or have low vision. This would align with Recommendation 72 from the final report by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

- Harmonise existing state-based AT programs and those operated by not-for-profit organisations;
- Be underpinned by an AT strategy, such as the one in place in the NDIS, which recognises the value of providing assistive technology to support and enhance a persons independence, and;
- Be driven by key performance indicators relating to the timely provision of assistive technology, in line with the aspirations of the NDIS Participant Service Guarantee.

The campaign is supported by more than 40 organisations representing people with disabilities in Australia.

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[1] Australian Healthcare Associates for the Australian Government Department of Health 2020, review-of-assistive-technology-programs-in-australia-final-report_0.pdf (health.gov.au)