Policy Directive

Assistive Technology

Summary	NSW Health provides assistive technology to support health needs. The Policy Directive outlines the governance framework and eligibility requirements for assistive technology provision.
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Distributed to	Ministry of Health, Public Health System
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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

POLICY STATEMENT

NSW Health provides assistive technology, primarily loaned to support health needs, to NSW residents who are not eligible for support through other schemes. NSW Health primarily loans assistive technology to support health needs.

This Policy Directive outlines the governance framework, eligibility criteria and the roles and responsibilities of NSW Health organisations for assistive technology provision across NSW Health. The approach to the provisions of assistive technology for NSW Health organisations, including EnableNSW and district equipment loan pools. All NSW Health organisations are expected to develop their own supporting guidelines.

SUMMARY OF POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Assistive technology is provided throughout NSW Health *(Local Health Districts, Specialty Health Networks and HealthShare NSW (EnableNSW)).*

Assistive technology provided by NSW Health is standardised equipment, primarily loaned to people who are not eligible for aids and equipment through other schemes.

NSW Health provides appropriately prescribed, timely, cost effective and clinically necessary assistive technology to:

- Support health needs.

- Reduce or prevent risk of injury or illness that would result in admission or readmission to hospital.

- Facilitate timely and safe discharge from hospital.

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Amendment notes
August-2020 (PD2020_026)	Deputy Secretary, Health System Strategy and Planning	PD2011_027, reviewed to reflect reforms in aged care and disability sector.
November 2019	Executive Director, Health and Social Policy	Ownership of document transferred to Health and Social Policy
May 2011 (PD2011_027)	Director-General	Rescinds PD2011_023

ATTACHMENTS

1. Assistive Technology: Procedures

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

This document outlines the assistive technology governance framework and eligibility requirements.

Assistive technologies are devices or systems that help people to have greater function, independence and safety. Assistive technologies help people perform activities they may not have previously been able to do, and in a manner that is safe. Assistive technologies can also prevent impairment and development of secondary conditions.

1.1 The Role of NSW Health

To achieve these aims:

NSW Health Organisations	Role

Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks	Will provide assistive technology including:
	 • prescribed consumables
	 • for short term loan:
	     ○ to reduce or prevent risk of injury or illness,
	     ○ to facilitate discharge,
	     ○ to ensure patient and carer safety on discharge and
	     ○ to support palliative care patients.
	 • Historically provided specialist services.
	 This is often provided through locally managed and funded Equipment Loan Pools (ELPs).

EnableNSW	Will provide assistive technology including: • for long term loan • Individually made items (as determined by the prescriber) • specific and prescribed consumables See EnableNSW website for details http://www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/services/aep

1.2 Local Operational Guidelines

NSW Health organisations are responsible for developing local operational guidelines outlining how assistive technology will be provided in accordance with this Policy Directive.

This Policy Directive must be read in parallel with local operational guidelines, supporting protocols, and equipment schedules. These documents provide detailed information on patient and prescriber eligibility, funding, administrative and procedural matters.

1.3 Service delivery responsibilities

If a person is eligible, the NSW Health system will loan assistive technology to:

- meet a specific, short term or ongoing health need and
- reduce the risk of injury and hospitalisation.

National reforms and directions have changed the way assistive technology supports and services are delivered in the health, disability and aged care sectors. The emergence of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and implementation of national aged care reforms have changed the way supports and services are delivered to people accessing assistive technologies. In this context, health need is defined as:

- **sustaining life**
- **treating and managing** health conditions (including chronic diseases)
- promoting **recovery and rehabilitation** and restoring or improving health and function following an illness or injury
- **preventing** development of secondary health conditions and hospital admission or readmission and injury to carers
- supporting a person receiving **palliative or end of life care**.

Better articulating NSW Health's role is a step to improving these system interface issues and resolving gaps in service delivery for people with assistive technology needs.

2   ELIGIBILITY

2.1 Eligibility criteria

A person is eligible to access assistive technology through NSW Health if:

- they are a resident of NSW or Lord Howe Island, or are an asylum seek, refugee or humanitarian visa holder residing in NSW or Lord Howe island;
- they are enrolled with Medicare
- the assistive technology is to support a health need; and,
- they are not receiving or eligible for assistive technology through a third party insurance or other Commonwealth, state or territory government schemes for the identified health need. Possible alternative funding sources are:
    - o NDIS
    - o Department of Veterans' Affairs
    - o Australian Government aged care services
    - o Compensation or damages for the condition requiring assistive technology (e.g. worker's compensation).

A person is ineligible for assistive technology through NSW Health if:

- they are eligible for assistive technology through alternative funding programs

- the assistive technology sought is required to support a disability

- they are a non-NSW resident seeking assistive technology in NSW

- they are an in-patient at a private hospital (unless local formal arrangements have been made between Districts or Specialty Health Networks)

- they have been assessed by an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) and approved for support through a Home Care Package or residential aged care.

- Requesting reimbursement for equipment already purchased.

Due to the historic nature of other programs that do not fund the full suite of assistive technology, there are grandfathered exceptions. For example, the Prosthetic Limb Service, which provides disability support, and Commonwealth Home Support Programme recipients, are still eligible for some EnableNSW services.

2.2 Prioritising assistive technology

Depending on the level of demand for services, assistive technology requests will be prioritised based on clinical need according to the hierarchy below:

1. To maintain life; for treatment of an acute episode; to facilitate discharge; or prevent hospitalisation or injury to person or carer

2. For primary self-care, communication and/or mobility.

3   GOVERNANCE

3.1   Organisational responsibilities

Organisation	Responsibilities
Ministry of Health	The Ministry has responsibility for setting assistive technology policy. This role includes: • Reviewing and updating the Assistive Technology Policy Directive as required. • Facilitating communication between NSW Health and key stakeholders on matters relevant to assistive technology policy. • Representing NSW Health in communication with the Commonwealth. • Setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and monitoring performance of the program. • Working with EnableNSW, Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks to address underperformance.
EnableNSW	EnableNSW is responsible for service provision for long term, individually made and highly specialised assistive technologies. This role includes: • Purchasing, maintaining, cleaning and repairing all assistive technology to

Organisation	Responsibilities
	the required standards, policies and procedures.
	• Developing and reviewing procedural documentation and information for patients and health care professionals.
	• Discretionary decision making.
	• Implementing and complying with the Assistive Technology Policy Directive.
	• Where agreed, supporting Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks with assistive technology provision.
	• Ensuring that eligibility criteria is applied in a consistent and equitable manner.
	• Monitoring the use and cost of assistive technology provided, to ensure sustainability.
	• Reporting against KPIs.
Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks	Districts and Networks are responsible for: • Ongoing operation of Equipment Loan Pools and historical specialist services • Purchasing, maintaining, storing, storage planning, cleaning and repairing all assistive technology to the required standards, policies and procedures. • Developing and reviewing procedural documentation and information for patients and health care professionals. • Implementing and complying with the Assistive Technology Policy Directive. • Ensuring eligibility criteria is applied in a consistent and equitable manner. • Employing staff for assistive technology provision and providing training as required. • Reporting against KPIs.
Steering Committee	The role of the Steering Committee is to provide strategic oversight and expert advice to: • Ensure appropriate consultation across stakeholders in developing NSW Health assistive technology service objectives and responsibilities • Guide development of the Policy Directive and Implementation Plan to achieve streamlined access to NSW Health funded assistive technology • Oversee assessment of future investment needs and opportunities to improve streamlined state-wide service access. • Reviewing assistive technology provision performance reports from across the state.

4   ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

4.1 Ownership of assistive technology items

To ensure equitable access and sustainability, assistive technologies provided to an eligible person on loan by EnableNSW, Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks (excluding individually made items and consumables) remain the property of NSW Health. Entities are required to have systems in place to ensure items are returned once they are no longer required.

Individually made assistive technologies (such as prosthetic limbs, orthotic devices and specialist footwear) and consumables that become the property of the person are exempt from these loan rules. Refer to the Local Operational Guidelines for more information.

4.2 Types of assistive technology provided

NSW Health organisations will maintain a schedule of the types of assistive technology that they provide.

4.2.1 Adding assistive technology types

NSW Health organisations need to meet the following requirements when adding new categories:

- it supports a health need as defined in this Policy Directive,

- an existing scheduled item does not fulfil the health need,

- there is sufficient clinical evidence to support including this equipment type,

- the equipment is cost effective

- a less expensive item cannot meet the same need, and

- there is the budget available to fund the equipment.

4.2.2 Removing assistive technology types

Categories can also be removed when:

- best practice no longer supports its use;

- there is no longer a demand for the technology;

- it has been superseded or recalled from use; or

- a safety issue has been identified with an equipment type or when a risk assessment has deemed it unsafe to be used and/or prescribed to patients.

4.3 Repairs, maintenance and refurbishment

NSW Health organisations will maintain and replace assistive technology while a person is eligible for their services. If a person is no longer eligible, the assistive technology needs to be returned to NSW Health. If a person purchases their own equipment, or makes modifications to loaned equipment, NSW Health is not responsible for future repairs or maintenance.

Returned assistive technology can be refurbished and reissued as long as:
- any required maintenance or repairs have been completed,

- it has been cleaned in accordance with local protocols

- it complies with the relevant Australian or International Standards, or Therapeutic Goods Administration registration (class 1 medical devices) as applicable, and

- It is cost effective to re-issue the item.

See the appropriate local operational guidelines for more information.

4.4 Moving interstate

4.4.1 Leaving NSW

Assistive technology provided by Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks for short term use must be returned.

For equipment for long term use, if a person is leaving NSW permanently, they can request to transfer ownership of their assistive technology to the equivalent scheme in their new state or territory, or themselves. These requests will be considered on a case by case basis. NSW Health is not responsible for ongoing repairs or maintenance or the freight costs for assistive technologies taken outside of NSW.

4.4.2 Moving to NSW

For people eligible for EnableNSW, assistive technology transferred from other state or territory schemes may be accepted for repair and maintenance, if the item is in good condition and it is an item provided by EnableNSW.

4.5 Donated assistive technology

Local Health Districts, Specialty Health Networks and EnableNSW may accept assistive technology donations. These items need to be assessed to ensure they are of sound working order, and, if suitable, refurbished for loan stock. (Local guidelines must provide a more detailed criteria for determining the quality of equipment).

5 FEES

NSW Health may charge fees for equipment usage, loan, delivery and/or repairs and servicing. Fees are not charged to cover the full cost of equipment, but to ensure:

- There is contribution to the cost of the equipment (such as purchasing, administration, staffing and storage costs),
- equipment is returned as soon as it is no longer needed (depending on fee structure), and
- equipment is looked after while it is in use.

This is consistent with the direction NSW Health is moving to ensure equity of access and sustainable equipment provision.

It is the responsibility of NSW Health organisations to provide information to the person about any applicable fees, including refundable deposits, returns, payment methods and the fee waiver process.

An administrative fee (including any delivery fees) can be charged. Administrative fees can also be waived, in line with the information set out in each organisation's Guidelines.

6 FEEDBACK, APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

6.1 Appeals

NSW Health organisations are required to provide information about how people or their representative can request a review of a decision if they believe that their application has been incorrectly assessed.

6.2 Feedback and complaints

NSW Health organisations are required to have a feedback and complaints management process in place. This must document appropriate avenues for resolving the person's concerns. This process is to include:

- user friendly system for accepting complaints,
- clear delegations and procedures for staff,
- recording system to capture complaints data,
- performance standards including timeframes for response and quality of response,
- routine monitoring and review of complaint trends,
- regular reviews of complaints received to identify ways to improve service delivery.

Consistent with the Complaints Management Policy Directive (PD2020_013), NSW Health organisations must use the IIMS system for logging complaints, where available.

6.3 Discretionary decision making

EnableNSW is required to have a discretionary process in place for exceptional circumstances.

7 PRIVACY

All staff must comply with the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* and the NSW Health Privacy Manual for Health Information.

8   GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Assistive Technology	Assistive technology is a device or system that enables individuals to have greater function, independence and safety. This includes aids and equipment provided by Local Health Districts, Specialty Health Networks and EnableNSW.
Equipment Loan Pools (ELPs)	In Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks, aids and equipment are stored, cleaned, maintained and issued through ELPs.
Disability	Disability, in relation to a person, includes a long-term physical, psychiatric, intellectual or sensory impairment that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the person's full and effective participation in the community on an equal basis with others NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014.
Prescribers	Prescribers are health professionals with the relevant qualification to prescribe the assistive technology item. Where required, prescribers must be registered through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Prescribers may be required to hold additional qualifications before prescribing high risk items. EnableNSW, Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks may request proof of a prescriber's qualifications.
Schedule	The list of assistive technology that can be provided by NSW Health entities.