

# COTA Victoria Policy Position



## Issue: Access to Assistive Technology

Adopted:

Review date:

***Definition: “Assistive technology” is an umbrella term that refers to any aid, piece of equipment or home modification that helps someone overcome the impact of disability or aging. Grab rails, ramps, chair lifts, hoists, prosthetic aids, wheelchairs and electric scooters are all examples of assistive technology.***

### Policy principles:

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- All older Victorians must have timely access to the assistive technology they need to help them live well. This means having access to:
  - Skilled assessments and referrals;
  - Equipment trials and demonstrations;
  - High and low-cost assistive technology;
  - Installation, set-up and customization;
  - Specialised assistive technology training;
  - Equipment maintenance, upgrades and repairs.
- A national assistive technology program is needed to improve access to assistive technology for older people with disability who are excluded from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
- In the absence of a national assistive technology program, the Victorian Government must increase funding for the State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP) to ensure it is continuing to fulfill its human rights obligations to Victorian citizens who are not eligible for the NDIS.

### Rationale for COTA Victoria’s position:

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- Access to assistive technology is a fundamental human right. This right applies to all Victorian citizens equally irrespective of age.
- Almost 50% of people over the age of 65 have a disability that affects their ability to perform everyday tasks.

- The timely provision of assistive technology plays a critical role in helping older people with disability to remain mobile, active and independent as they age. It:
  - Increases independence and participation in everyday activities;
  - Reduces reliance on family and Carers, thereby improving personal relationships and minimising carer stress;
  - Minimises the onset of secondary health conditions;
  - Reduces the risk of accidents and falls;
  - Enables people to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible.
- While the NDIS is able to fully fund the assistive technology that is needed by participants, this scheme is only projected to support around 10% of people with disability across Victoria. Older people with disability are the largest cohort to miss out on receiving support under the NDIS. This is because the NDIS Act requires participants to be under the age of 65 when making an access request for the scheme.
- Funding for assistive technology for people who are excluded from the NDIS is spread across more than 65 funding streams at the state and Commonwealth level. This complex maze of funding is very difficult for many older people to navigate.
- At present, none of the existing funding streams can provide older people with access to assistive technology on an equitable basis with participants of the NDIS. The amount of funding an individual receives can vary greatly depending on their age, where they live and how and where their disability was acquired.
- Many older Victorians with disability are heavily reliant on the Victorian State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP) to access the assistive technology they need. This program is significantly underfunded and cannot meet current levels of demand. As such, older Victorians with disability are commonly forced to wait upwards of 12 months to receive the support they need, part or fully fund their assistive technology themselves or go without altogether.
- Victorian citizens living in residential aged care are not eligible for the State-Wide Equipment Program and are unable to access the assistive technology they need elsewhere. This funding gap continues to compromise the safety, independence and quality of life of many people living in aged care.

## Recommendations:

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- The Victorian Government increase funding for the Victorian State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP) to provide a higher subsidy for consumers, reduce wait times and expand eligibility to people receiving aged care.
- The Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth and other state and territory governments to champion the need for a national assistive technology program for people with disability who are not eligible for the NDIS. COTA Victoria is Coordinating a national campaign called Assistive Technology for All (ATFA) to advocate for the establishment of a national program. Further information about our campaign is available at: [www.assistivetechforall.org.au](http://www.assistivetechforall.org.au).