

## **THE PROGRAM OF APPLIANCES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE (PADP)**

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## The Program of Appliances for Disabled People (PADP) (Inquiry)

Submission by Invacare Australia

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Sent By Shaun Jenkinson General Manager

Invacare is the global leader in the home medical product industry. It operates in more than 80 countries and has the largest distribution network in the industry. With this comes the responsibility to work with rehabilitation and home medical experts and clinicians to ensure that people with disabilities have access to new innovative and quality products that they need. Aids and Equipment often require modifications to suit individual needs as inappropriate or ill-fitting equipment can cause serious medical complications. Invacare has a team of specially trained consultants to resolve such problems.

Invacare works closely with prescribers and approved dealers to assist them in better understanding the equipment so that it is the most appropriate for the person's needs, this reduces the time prescribers currently spend in researching equipment manufacturers and suppliers to get information on products.

Invacare welcome this opportunity to provide a formal submission to the Upper House Inquiry into PADP. This submission provides some background to the value of Aids and Equipment that is central to the PADP and the role they play.

In addition there are several areas that we believe are important to consider when reviewing the current and future service provided to users of products funded under this scheme.

The rationale for Supporting Aids & Equipment

Timely and appropriate assistance with Aids and Equipment can have enormous benefits, not only on the quality of life for the person requiring assistance but also for their family carers. Conservative estimates show that carers save our economy \$16 billion annually. Carers are the major providers of community care services, delivering 74% of all services to people needing care and support.

The provision of appropriate Aids and Equipment benefits and supports an informal caring relationship. Personal carers who are supported in their role with the appropriate tools and aids can provide higher quality at-home care that in turn can lead to a reduction in expenditure on acute health care, residential aged care, supported accommodation for people with disabilities and other community care services. Maintaining individuals at home is cost effective when compared to institutional care.

One issue that carers have raised with the carers peak body - Carers Australia - is the delay in processing applications and receipt of equipment. This is particularly an issue where people are returning home from hospital but cannot receive government community services until appropriate equipment is in place. Specialist lifting equipment may be required for safe manual handling of the Patient. Without this access to equipment, the carer and their patient are heavily reliant on other community services and charities.

Inconsistent management of waiting lists and the types of medical equipment available is also raised as an issue by carers. Again, limited access to Aids and Equipment means that personal, at-home carers are not able to perform their role and patients may be forced to rely on more expensive government health care.

The service provided by the disability equipment schemes effectively lessens the economic burden on Australia's health and aged care systems by contributing to the prevention of premature and inappropriate entry to institutional care and reliance on government health services.

However in this regard the potential the disability equipment scheme is not maximised as there is incomplete information available regarding needs for disability aids and equipment.

#### Areas for consideration when reviewing the current scheme

1.                   The inefficiencies that exist within the current assessment and reassessment process. Long approval times frequently require the Suppliers/Dealers to visit clients more than once to script high end products. A more streamlined process would remove multiple visits and avoid reassessment of individuals where their condition or status may have deteriorated after the initial visit. This change would help to reduce frustration for the clients and the carers.
  
2.                   Central purchasing can decrease local service and user satisfaction. Centralised purchasing is often perceived as increasing efficiency but this should not be at the expense of local service. Many products require home delivery, installation, training and after sales service. For simple, out of the box items this may not be a real issue. Many items do require attendance of personnel with expertise to ensure safety of the end user. If this support is removed because of a central purchasing arrangement then the burden will fall to local community therapists to install equipment correctly and provide essential on site training. Transferring this workload will reduce the ability of local therapists to maintain current caseloads. Invacare is a national supplier that works through a strong network of approved dealers. The essential local service, currently provided at no cost by Invacare and the dealer network, is critical to the success of any program designed to support users and carers and should be considered when reviewing the program.
  
3.                   Funding releases often appear to be inconsistent and the flow can be "lumpy" this presents the therapists and suppliers with a challenge to adapt resources to demand. When money is released "bolus" style there is often a rush and the resultant bottle neck leads to reduced service levels for the user. Smoother funding with more streamlined approvals will result in significantly improved

planning and ultimately much greater customer service for the clients.

4. Payment delays are also a challenge for suppliers. Cash flow is critical to any business and the impact is not only to the supplier. Reducing inventory levels can cause delay in supply to the end user and reduce the service levels expected. There exists a desire to service the clients and deliver product with tight time lines but the impact of delayed payments has a ripple effect all the way back through a global supply chain. Greater emphasis on this area would increase service levels.

5. Many industry bodies play a vital role in consultation regarding policy development. There is significant expertise and experience that exists within the industry. Invacare along with other manufacturers, dealers and distributors should be a valuable asset to policy makers. I strongly recommend that the industry is represented on advisory committees that are in place to review current and future practice.

If you require additional information regarding this submission please contact:

Shaun Jenkinson General Manager Invacare Australia

Yours Sincerely

Shaun Jenkinson