

Project Title

Assistive technology provision for the promotion of health and wellbeing: A needs analysis and solution building approach

Principal Investigator: Professor Louise Gustafsson, The Hopkins Centre

Project Description

Aim: The aim of the project was to conduct a needs assessment of the assistive technology sector in Queensland, establishing the normative, comparative, expressed and felt needs of funding body representatives, service providers/health professionals and recipients of assistive technology.

Key Findings

Seventeen websites from the agencies and schemes that manage funding within Queensland (normative need) and around Australia (comparative need) were audited and interviews completed with representatives from 11 of the organisations. The findings highlighted that there were variations in the quantity and depth of information provided on the websites, particularly regarding AT funding and specific AT solutions available. The detail provided was variable and the most prominent AT information noted was around driving and transport, design and building for access and safety, and mobility. Interview findings highlighted challenges in operationalising legislation and guidelines, particularly translating this information into funding decisions regarding AT. The study also found there was very little publicly available information regarding how legislation, policies and procedures informed decision-making on AT.

Twenty-nine AT advisors completed a survey, nine attended focus groups and six AT suppliers participated in interviews (expressed need). There were frustrations about the processes, which led to unnecessary delays or unfavourable outcomes to applications for AT. Despite feeling confident in the services that they delivered, advisors were worried about limited access to expert consultation and identified a need to build capacity and capability in the sector. Access to AT for hire or trial was problematic with conflicting tensions from the advisors and suppliers. However, both worried about the impact on the agency of the AT recipient in the process. Finally, the challenges and frustrations are influencing who the AT advisors choose to work with, from both an agency or scheme and recipient perspective. People with complex needs were often at greatest disadvantage.

Forty-one AT recipients completed a survey and 20 participated in interviews (felt need). The recipients identified that they value AT but their experiences within the process, from funding to delivery, can be challenging and frustrating. The AT recipients felt stuck in a system where they couldn't control their AT outcomes and satisfaction with their experiences and involvement in the process became progressively lower as they moved from the initial stage of imagining possibilities, to exploring options, choosing and then living with the AT. Positive working relationships with AT advisors were reported when the advisor had the requisite knowledge and skills, however this was not consistent across the sector. Finally, there was an identified need for improved access to AT for trial, including access to a range of possible AT solutions and trialing within their own environments prior to the funding applications.

Conclusion

There were three key needs identified for the AT sector in Queensland including: greater transparency and more publicly available information from the regulatory bodies, agencies, and schemes that manage the provision of AT, including the operationalisation of 'reasonable and necessary'; capacity and capability building of the AT advisor workforce; and improved access to AT for trial. It is proposed that these are essential to address many of the challenges, frustrations, and delays currently experienced in the sector.