

Environmental Support Services (ESS) Work Programme

April 2008

The ESS Work Programme is focusing on two key areas as part of its aim to improve service delivery for disabled people of all ages:

- Ongoing preparation of funding guidelines for new and extended service initiatives as announced in late 2007.
- Planning and implementation of a series of Roadshows with key representatives from District Health Boards.

Funding Guidelines

Two new service initiatives were introduced during March. These were:

- **Hearing Assistive Technology;** this includes visual or vibrating alert systems (e.g. visual smoke alarm) for Deaf, Deafblind and hearing impaired people to ensure that they are able to live at home safely.
- **Postural Management;** Seating to Go undertook a series of training workshops for therapists who are working with children and adults who have a significant physical disability and could benefit from additional support when lying down (or in a position other than sitting). The previous accreditation area of *Seating* has now been extended to cover all areas of postural management:
 - *Lying*
 - *Sitting*
 - *Standing.*

Therapists who wish to submit applications to Accessable or Enable New Zealand for lying supports such as sleep systems will need to complete the two-day training workshop. Two further workshops are planned for 2008/09 and subsequent years. These workshops are funded by the Ministry of Health and are provided free of charge to DHB therapists.

Vehicle modifications

Funding guidelines have been prepared so that modifications to family vehicles can be undertaken. This new funding means that families with disabled children (aged 15 years and under) will be able to receive funding support to modify their vehicles so that they can get out and about as a family more safely and easily. Other changes have been made to the provision of vehicle modifications:

- The requirement for income and asset testing for modifications (such as a vehicle hoist) has been removed
- The upper limit for vehicle modifications has been increased from \$969.00 to \$11,900 in the Enable New Zealand area
- Funding for purchase of a vehicle is considered separately from funding for modifications; upper limits of \$11,900 apply for both vehicle purchase and/or vehicle modifications.

The new guidelines will be published on the Accessable <www.accessable.co.nz> and Disability Funding <disabilityfunding.co.nz> websites as soon as they have been finalised and the new service will be available from the end of April.

Communication Assistive Technology

Funding for equipment and training to support people to communicate more effectively in their daily lives has been increased. New guidelines have been prepared with assistance from key people involved in this area of work, and these will be published by the end of April. The accreditation areas of Communication and Information and Communication Processing will be changed to:

- *Face to Face Communication*, and
- *Written Communication*

A number of training workshops are being planned for those working with people who have communication difficulties and these will be delivered by members of the Assistive Technology Association of New Zealand (ATANZ). The workshops, funded by the Ministry of Health, will be held in main centres across the country in June/July this year and there is no cost to attend.

Regional DHB Meetings

A series of meetings with DHBs are currently being planned to discuss various aspects of Equipment and Modification Services. Topics for discussion with key service managers include:

- Funding of Equipment and Modification Services
- Use of new funding announced in Budget 2007
- Assessor accreditation
- Ongoing engagement and communication.

Formal letters of invitation to these meetings and accompanying information packs have been sent to the DHBs and 8 meetings will be held during May.

Other Updates

Assessor Accreditation

Stage One of this project, to evaluate the current system of accreditation for assessors who recommend MOH funded equipment and modifications, has now been completed. A number of recommendations have been made including strategies to monitor and address the development needs of the 'assessor' workforce. Future changes to the current system will be implemented as time and resources permit.

Improving Hearing Aid Services

The Ministry has received a report on the first stage of the project looking into the Development and Implementation of a National Funding and Service System for Hearing Aids. The purpose of this project is to develop and implement a system that will provide the Ministry with a cost effective way of purchasing hearing aids to make access to them more affordable and equitable for the people who need them.

The Ministry is now considering the recommendations presented and will formalise the next steps within the next four weeks. Stage 2 of the project will involve the completion of further detailed analysis of the following models; eligibility, delivery and purchase of hearing aids and should be completed by 30 June 2008.

Contact Sue Primrose