

Ministry of Health Update; Equipment and Modification Services

August 2010

Over the past two years, the Ministry of Health has been undertaking a number of projects to support ongoing improvements to the provision of equipment and modifications for disabled people of all ages. This work will also assist with management of increased demand for these services. A summary of key projects which have involved representation from Occupational Therapists and/or will impact on the practice of those who are currently working as *Specialised Assessors* for the provision of Equipment and Modification Services is provided below.

1. DHB Assessor Engagement

In June the Ministry of Health hosted clinicians at two meetings in Wellington to seek their views on ways to manage the increasing demand for Equipment and Modification Services (EMS) that would not impact on good clinical practice or the safety of disabled people. Over the last 5 years, despite significant increases in funding, waiting lists have grown and many people have to wait longer for services. 35 people, mainly Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists working in District Health Boards, attended the two meetings, with robust debate about many suggested options that have potential to assist with managing demand. Several ideas were discussed including:

- improving information about consumers purchasing their own equipment and/or modifications
- working with other agencies and groups to encourage people to better plan for their changing needs as they age
- reviewing eligibility criteria to better target services, and
- improving training for therapists who undertake the assessment role.

We are now considering the suggestions made from the two meetings and will use this information to guide future planning that will assist with managing demand for equipment and modifications. The contributions made to these discussions have been highly valued, and we look forward to progressing some of the suggestions in the coming year.

2. Prioritisation

The Prioritisation Tool is currently being finalised and will be trialled in three District Health Board (DHB) areas - Counties Manukau, Hutt and Southern, starting within the next few weeks. In addition, some specialised assessment services (such as wheelchairs and seating and communication assistive technology) will also be participating in the trial. An information booklet has been prepared to support the assessors involved in the trial. A key part of this tool is the inclusion of a client self-assessed questionnaire about the impact of their disability on their life, which will be completed by them (or their key support people if they are unable to do this on their own). Consumer representatives have been involved in the development of this brief questionnaire and an application is being made for ethics approval for this section of the new prioritisation tool.

3. NASC and EMS Guideline for High Cost and/or Complex Applications

This guideline has been developed because it is recognised that consideration of many high cost and/or complex equipment and modifications should be undertaken in collaboration with Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASC) organisations. The guideline outlines the circumstances where increased collaboration between the EMS Assessors and NASC is required. It will guide a closer working relationship between NASCs and Assessors and assist with ensuring that services, particularly costly housing modifications, provide the best value for money solution/s to meet the person's needs. It provides detail of roles and responsibilities and has supporting flow-charts and a summary report which needs to be completed by both parties.

The draft version of this guideline has been circulated to DHBs for final feedback and it will be introduced by the EMS providers, Accessable and Enable New Zealand, by September 2010.

4. Assessor Accreditation

An expert advisory group, comprising representation from relevant clinicians working in District Health Boards (DHBs) and other assessment services, has been working with the Ministry to prepare for the implementation of the framework, which will commence on 30 August 2010.

This framework will replace the current assessor accreditation scheme that has been in operation since the early 1990's. The changes will not have any direct impact upon the assessments undertaken by current specialised assessors and, where credentialling is a new requirement, the Ministry is putting in place a number of training opportunities and tools to support specific skill development.

The new framework has three levels of accreditation for access to Ministry funded equipment and modification services. These levels are:

i) **Approved Assessors** – allied health professionals (for example occupational therapists and physiotherapists) whose existing graduate level training is considered sufficient to assess for and recommend equipment (for example commode chairs, walking frames, household management items) and basic housing modification services. Approved Assessors will also include other support personnel such as service coordinators working for organisations supporting people who have sensory loss.

ii) **Credentialed Assessors** – specific service areas where additional training requirements will be necessary before clinicians can recommend Ministry funded equipment and modification services. These service areas will include wheeled mobility and postural management, communication assistive technology, housing modifications, and vehicle purchase and modifications.

iii) **Service Accreditation** - specific service areas, primarily community health services, can be accredited to allow relevant District Health Board staff to undertake assessments for certain equipment items (for example low cost, low risk, high volume equipment such as shower stools and over toilet frames) thereby reducing duplication of assessments and streamlining equipment provision.

Under the current Ministry's requirements, people completing assessments have been accredited or registered as 'specialised assessors'. The majority of these specialised assessors will be automatically transitioned to the new accreditation programme as either an Approved or Credentialed Assessor where they will have six months to complete any requirements needed to maintain their status for a further three year period. All those people who are already registered on the Enable New Zealand accreditation data base will receive notification of transition requirements as they relate to them over the next few weeks. Service accreditation will be available later in the year for introduction in DHBs that choose to participate in this approach.

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