



**Carers Victoria submission  
Towards Solutions for Assistive Technology – Discussion  
Paper December 2014**

**Carers Victoria**

**February 2015**

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### **About Carers Victoria**

Carers Victoria is the state-wide peak organisation representing those who provide care. We represent more than 700,000 family carers across Victoria – people caring for a person with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or someone with an age-related condition. The people being cared for could be a parent, child, spouse, grandparent or a friend.

Carers Victoria is a member of the National Network of Carers Associations, as well as the Victorian Carer Services Network. Carers Victoria is a non-profit association which relies on public and private sector support to fulfil its mission with and on behalf of carers.

Carers Victoria is a membership-based organisation. Our members primarily consist of family carers, who play an important role in informing our work, contributing to advocacy and strategic aims, and distributing information more widely to other carers.

Carers Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the NDIA concerning the proposed approach outlined in the Discussion Paper 'Towards Solutions for Assistive Technology', and is supportive of the key objectives outlined in the paper.

The proposed managed procurement approach outlined in the discussion paper raises concerns about participant choice, accessibility to suppliers who do not become part of the 'preferred supplier' pool, consumer protections, and the availability of access to small, niche suppliers and their products. For a detailed discussion of these issues and the impacts, Carers Victoria refers the NDIA to the submission by the Assistive Technology Suppliers Australasia.

## **Background – family carers and the role of Carers Victoria**

Carers<sup>1</sup> provide unpaid care and support to a family member or friend needing assistance with a disability, mental illness, chronic health condition or age-related frailty. Carers come from all walks of life, across all age groups and all cultures. Not all carers identify themselves as carers, and may instead identify themselves in terms of their family and friend relationships.

There are an estimated 773,400 informal carers in Victoria, which is 13.6% of the Victorian population. Of these, 217,800 (3.8% of the Victorian population) are primary carers, defined as providing the majority of ongoing care to the person requiring assistance<sup>2</sup>.

Carers Victoria supports caring families through information, online and face to face training and education programs, respite support, counselling and systemic advocacy. In 2013-14 Carers Victoria had 28,545 interactions with carers through our carer advisory line, counselling and other support services.

## **Carers Victoria comments**

Carers Victoria would like to make the following comments in response to the discussion paper:

1. The discussion paper is silent on the role carers can hold with regards to assisting the people they care for access and select assistive technology, though there is reference to 'trusted others' in the paper. While Carers Victoria supports the maximisation of participant choice and control, carers do have a vital role with regards to assistive technology for people with disability. This role should be acknowledged and considered in reference to any proposed approach to assistive technology.
2. The discussion paper is also silent regarding the flow on benefits to carers of people with disability who will have access to assistive technology that increases, maintains or improves their functional capacity. Benefits for carers include avoidance of potential injuries; along with a potential reduction in the carer role through the

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'carers', 'family carers' and 'caring family/ies' used in this submission includes the diverse range of people in care relationships, including carers and people receiving care in same-sex families, 'families of choice', friends and others who provide unpaid care.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) *2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*, Cat. No. 4430.0.

increased independence of the person with disability as a result of their access to aids and equipment.

3. Carers Victoria supports the development of a robust Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (page 22). While acceptable levels of quality and accountability to the NDIA participant is paramount, Carers Victoria recommends this be expanded to include carers, particularly if the carer is required to use or provide assistance with the assistive technology. Carers should also have access to any complaints process that is implemented within the quality assurance framework.
4. The peer mentor approach (page 28) to build participant capacity is positive; however the approach should supplement, and not replace, access to professional support. The NDIA may wish to expand this concept to consider adding in a family based approach of peer mentor families if appropriate in certain situations.