

CBM AUSTRALIA POLICY NOTES

Disability support services: Assistive technology and support services

The CBMA policy note provides a **high level overview** of our **understanding and policy position** on relevant topics, and outlines our **engagement with these areas** in conjunction with our partners and other areas of the organisation.

Definitions

'**Assistive technology**' (AT) is an umbrella term that refers to '**assistive products**' (also called **assistive devices**) and '**assistive services**' that **maintain or improve an individual's functioning** and independence.ⁱ **Assistive products** allow people with disabilities to **perform an activity they would otherwise be unable to do** or enables them to do so with more ease and safety.ⁱⁱ The World Health Organisation (WHO) categorises AT into six groups of functioning: **cognition, communication, hearing, mobility, self-care, and vision**.ⁱⁱⁱ It is fundamental to **promoting dignity and wellbeing** and improving the livelihoods of people with disabilities as it enables people to participate in education, the labour market, and social activities, while reducing the need for formal health services and long-term care.^{iv} In turn, this has a broader impact on the individual's family and community, as well as the healthcare system.

The scope of **assistive products** is wide ranging and includes hearing aids, wheelchairs, prostheses, spectacles, and communication aids. In addition to products, **assistive services** are also a **necessary element of AT and are essential in ensuring products are functional and effective**. WHO recommends four types of services – **assessment, fitting, user training, and follow up** – to ensure that products are beneficial for individuals' needs.^v

'**Support services**' do not fall under the umbrella of AT. Support services are **intended to facilitate community inclusion and enable people with disabilities to live independently** and with autonomy. They can include personal assistance, living arrangement services, and person-to-person mobility and communication support. Similarly, '**rehabilitation**' sits alongside AT with the purpose of **optimising functioning in individuals with health conditions** to support their interaction with their environment.^{vi} This involves interventions that build muscle strength and skill-building to support eating, socialising, and self-care.^{vii} While **these concepts do not fall within the scope of AT**, they work together to facilitate inclusion and equity for people with disabilities.

Assistive technology

WHO estimates that 1 billion people need AT, with this number set to rise to more than 2 billion by 2050 in line with the aging of the global population and an increase in non-communicable diseases.^{viii} **Access to AT and support services is limited in developing countries**, with only 1 in 10 people in need having access to AT at a global level.^{ix} **Access to AT is recognised as a human right** in Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Article 16 recognises the importance of rehabilitation for people with disabilities to support meaningful participation in society.^x Universal access to high-quality AT is necessary to the fulfilment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its cross-cutting impacts in:

- **Goal 3** – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- **Goal 4** – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- **Goal 10** – Reduce inequality within and among countries.^{xi}

There are **numerous barriers to AT that prevent its uptake and efficacy**. Prominent barriers include but are not limited to lack of awareness, high costs, limited physical and geographical access, inadequate product range and quality, and procurement and delivery challenges.^{xii} **For assistive products to be effective, they must be combined with assistive services** for individual assessment, fitting, training, and repair.^{xiii} WHO suggests that services for AT products be integrated into health, education, and social services, as opposed to being a standalone service.^{xiv}

Support services

Support services are often coupled with AT, and although they serve similar end goals, they operate separately. In line with the CRPD which foregrounds personhood, autonomy, and community inclusion, **support services are intended to enable community living**.^{xv} Article 19b of the CRPD requires States to ensure that people with disabilities have access to required in-home, residential, or other community support services to support living and inclusion in the community and to prevent segregation.^{xvi}

The disability rights movement has proposed that **human support be organised through multiple approaches**, such as one-to-one support (personal assistance) and community-based support (peer support, supported decision-making circles).^{xvii} As such, **support services are among the suite of preconditions to inclusion alongside AT, accessibility, social protection, non-discrimination, and community-based inclusive development**. Barriers that might prevent people

from accessing support services include lack of geographical access, services being inadequate for the individuals' needs, lack of financial capacity, discrimination, and past negative experiences with health care and other providers.^{xviii}

CBM Australia's position on assistive technology and support services

CBM Australia (CBMA) outlined its position on AT and support services in its [submission](#) to the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (IDEARS) to be released in 2024. In the submission, **CBMA recognises AT as a necessary precondition for disability equity and inclusion** and as integral to quality and accessible healthcare. CBMA calls on the Australian government to understand AT as being part of a holistic model of care that includes support services.

As such, **emphasis is placed on support services involving the leadership of people with disabilities in their design as well as service redesign for different cohorts**, such as people with psychosocial disabilities and young people with disabilities. CBMA echoes the calls of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Pacific Disability Forum for **greater investment by states in support services**.

CBMA's recommendation to the Australian government is that **Australia plays a leadership role in ensuring the provision of appropriate, quality and affordable AT and support services** across the Indo-Pacific by:

- **Working with partners** to establish a Pacific regional procurement facility for quality and affordable AT by 2025.
- **Providing funding for regular training** of multi-disciplinary personnel in the maintenance of AT.
- **Funding pilots and scale ups** of effective, contextualised rights-based support services.

CBMA's support for AT and support services is informed by the positions of partner countries and its necessity in the Indo-Pacific region. Regional development frameworks that prioritise the right to AT and support services include:

- Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025
- Western Pacific Regional Framework on Rehabilitation

CBM Australia engagement

In an advocacy capacity, **CBMA is supporting regional stakeholders calls for regional procurement facilities** for AT and improved support services, including

necessary training around AT to ensure that it can be maintained and fitted for individual needs.

In a program capacity, **CBMA is supporting local partners and country offices to provide wider coverage of high-quality AT and their associated support services.** As of the end of 2023, CBMA has programs focusing on strengthening physical rehabilitation in Nepal and Papua New Guinea.

Annex: Associated resources

Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) – [AHP Bangladesh Phase III Impact Report: An honest account](#)

- This report provides a detailed overview of the AHP response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Cox's Bazar resulting from the Rohingya genocide. It outlines the response of AHP and their partners (including CBMA), including the role of assistive devices in a humanitarian setting.

CBM Australia – [CBM Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy \(IDEARS\) submission](#)

- This submission details CBMA's recommendation to the Australian government on AT and support services in addition to other detailed recommendations to improve disability equity in international development.

International Disability Alliance et al. – [Community 2030 Narrative: Towards sustainable support systems for community inclusion of persons with disabilities](#)

- This document provides a strong analysis of the state of support and care systems and how this intersects with the global care economy. It details the calls of the disability rights movement for improved support services.

Pacific Disability Forum – [Submission to DFAT's New International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#)

- This submission to IDEARS outlines PDF's recommendations to the Australian Government on AT and support services to improve their status in the Pacific region in addition to other detailed recommendations to improve disability equity in international development.

Pacific Islands Forum – [Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025](#)

- This framework supports Pacific governments to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in line with the CRPD and provides a regional process for strengthening coordination of national initiatives.

United Nations – [Transformation of services for persons with disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights on persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn](#)

- This report by the Special Rapporteur details how support services should be reimagined to give effect to the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community. It calls for a move away

from dependency models of care to align with the rights enshrined in the CRPD.

World Health Organisation –

Assistive technology procurement study: technical report

- This report explores the current challenges with and strategies to strengthening the procurement of appropriate AT to increase access for people in Pacific Island countries and areas. It presents procurement options that have been discussed in collaboration with Pacific stakeholders.

Global perspective on assistive technology: proceedings of the GReAT Consultation 2019

- This report provides an incredibly detailed look into different areas of AT worldwide and issues regarding need, demand, supply, and good practices for innovation and recommendations for improvement.

Global report on assistive technology

- This was developed with UNICEF in response to the World Health Assembly resolution on improving access to AT and provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of AT worldwide and makes recommendations for improving access.

Western Pacific regional framework on rehabilitation

- This framework outlines how countries can strengthen rehabilitation as part of the continuum of care within their own national contexts and promotes knowledge sharing to assist in the attainment of universal health coverage in the region.

ⁱ WHO (World Health Organisation) (2023), *Assistive technology*, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology>.

ⁱⁱ UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) (2016), *Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the rights of persons with disabilities*, Catalina Devandas-Aguilar.

ⁱⁱⁱ WHO (2020), *Assistive technology procurement study: technical report*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619178>.

^{iv} WHO (2023), *Assistive technology*, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology>.

^v WHO and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) (2022), *Global report on assistive technology*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451>.

^{vi} WHO Western Pacific (2019), *Western Pacific regional framework on rehabilitation*.

^{vii} WHO Western Pacific (2019), *Western Pacific regional framework on rehabilitation*.

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- ^{viii} WHO (World Health Organisation) (2020), *Assistive technology procurement study: technical report*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619178>.
- ^{ix} Mishra, S., Laplante-Levesque, A., Barbareschi, G. et al. (2022), 'Assistive technology needs, access and coverage, and related barriers and facilitators in the WHO European region: a scoping review,' *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17483107.2022.2099021>.
- ^x UN DESA (United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs) (2023), *Assistive technology for inclusive development*, https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2023_cpd56-side-event_who-unicef_cn.pdf.
- ^{xi} WHO (World Health Organisation) (2020), *Assistive technology procurement study: technical report*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619178>.
- ^{xii} WHO and UNICEF (2022), *Global report on assistive technology*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451>.
- ^{xiii} Borg, J., Lindstrom, A. & Larsson, S. (2011), 'Assistive technology in developing countries: a review from the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,' *Prosthetics and Orthotics International*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309364610389351>.
- ^{xiv} WHO and UNICEF (2022), *Global report on assistive technology*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451>.
- ^{xv} UNGA (2023), *Transformation of services for persons with disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights on persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn*.
- ^{xvi} UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) (2016), *Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the rights of persons with disabilities, Catalina Devandas-Aguilar*.
- ^{xvii} IDA, OHCHR, CBM, UNICEF & IDDC (International Disability Alliance, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, International Disability and Development Consortium) (2023), *Community 2030 Narrative: Towards sustainable support systems for community inclusion of persons with disabilities*.
- ^{xviii} WHO and UNICEF (2022), *Global report on assistive technology*, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451>.