Equipping inclusion: the need for policy change for Aids and Equipment funding in Victoria

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Format of presentation

- Context:
  - Victorian Aids and Equipment funding context

- Research: 2 reports
  - wait times
  - cost burden to people with a disability
  - impacts of unmet need

- Advocacy strategy
  - Equipping inclusion forum
  - Aids and Equipment Action Alliance
  - Outcomes to date
Why is Victoria’s data of interest to you?

- Ingredients of process - able to replicate
- Possibility of national, or multi-state / territory coalitions
- Importance of combined action in terms of inclusion of aids and equipment in the next CSTDA.
Context

- The current Victorian Aids and Equipment Program (VAEP) is not consistent with Victorian, national or overseas policy directions.
- VAEP reviewed twice previously but no reports made public
- VAEP 2006 review by KPMG
- Widespread issues: long waiting times, high cost burden, insufficient funds
- No public evidence available
Vision:

“By 2012, Victoria will be a stronger and more inclusive community - a place where diversity is embraced and celebrated, and where everyone has the same opportunities to participate in the life of the community, and the same responsibilities towards society as all other citizens of Victoria.” (p. 7)
Goal 1:

“Enabling people with a disability to pursue their own individual lifestyle means ensuring people have maximum control over their own lives. To achieve this, the Government will reorient disability supports so that they are more responsive and more focused on people’s individual needs and choices, and to the needs of their families and carers” (p.11)
Context: Victorian Aids and Equipment Program (DHS): annual budget $21M

Aim

…to provide people with permanent or long term disabilities with subsidised aids, equipment and home modifications to enhance their safety and independence, reduce their reliance on carers and prevent premature admission to institutional care or high cost services. (p. 5)
Priorities of access to A &EP funds

High urgency category:

- critical to safety or injury prevention
- no aids and equipment will lead to deterioration of health and functioning
- no aids and equipment will lead to current living arrangements at risk
Creating public evidence: Research

- Two research projects separately initiated.

- Following data collection, the two agencies combined with others on a collaborative advocacy strategy.
The evidence: Scope research

Sample of 57 Scope client files across all client groups (early childhood - adult) in seven regions of Victoria.

Key topics:

- **range of equipment costs** requested by clients;
- proportion of **funds provided by VAEP** for each request;
- proportion of **funds to be provided by client** or from non VAEP sources;
- proportion of **funds provided from all government sources** for each request;
- **wait times for clients** at each stage of the equipment request process;
- **sources of ‘top up’ funds** to which clients had made requests.
The evidence: Scope report

Range of equipment costs requested by clients

- The equipment requests of this sample totalled $248,959 (for 64 items of equipment) = average of $3,890 per equipment item.
- The average minimum request across = $923
- The average maximum cost was $11,109 (with the highest individual request being $20,715)
- The highest median cost of equipment request was found in the school aged client group
The evidence: Scope report

Proportion of funds provided by VAEP for each request:

- 96% of applications were approved by VAEP
- Only 9% received VAEP funding to meet 100% of their equipment request.
- The VAEP provided an average allocation of 60% of the total equipment cost requested.
The evidence: Scope report

Proportion of funds to be provided by client or from non VAEP sources:

- 91% of clients were required to self fund or source top up funding to meet the gap between VAEP funding and total cost of equipment.
- Clients were required to find an average 40% of the total equipment cost.
- In general, clients could expect to require a maximum amount of top up funds of between $3,000 - $7,000 per equipment request (though one client required $16,415).
The evidence: Scope report

Proportion of funds provided from all government sources for each request:

- 38% of applications for top up funds made to government sources
  
  71% of these are made to the Department of Human Services.

- School aged clients make only 15% of applications for top up funds to government sources, as compared to between 40-67% of applications made to government by other client groups.

  This suggests that school aged clients are either not eligible for other government sources or lack the knowledge or support to access these sources where eligible.
The evidence: Scope report

Wait times for clients at each stage of the equipment request process

- **Between assessment of need by therapist and delivery of equipment:**
  - average wait is 208-238 days (7-8 months)
  - typical maximum being around 276 and 306 days of wait.
  - a further 1-2 months’ wait occurs whilst awaiting modifications, fitting and training in equipment

- **Between application to VAEP and approval of VAEP funds:**
  - average wait is 79-109 days

- **Between approval of VAEP funds and the delivery of equipment:**
  - average wait is 103 – 133 days
The evidence: Scope report

Loan of equipment whilst waiting for funds:

- 9% of clients loaned equipment whilst awaiting equipment funding and delivery.
The evidence: MCM report

Sample: 26 staff working in 12 health and community organisations in Melbourne’s northern suburbs

Key topics:
- impacts on clients and carers of delays and unmet needs for aids and equipment
- staff time spent sourcing top up funds
- ideas for reform of VAEP
The evidence: MCM report
Impacts on clients and carers of delays and unmet needs for aids and equipment

- 81% had been unable to obtain equipment when needed

Impact of delays and lack of equipment:
- 70% reported clients experienced stress or depression
- 62% reported clients experiences physical deterioration
- 46% reported clients experienced exclusion
- 46% reported clients experienced isolation
- 15% reported young clients experienced lost opportunities in developmental years
- Carers experienced stress and financial hardship
The evidence: MCM report

Staff time spent sourcing top up funds

- average of 4 hours per week (per respondent) sourcing top up funds
- range of between 1-20 hours per week

Estimated cost of top up search in staff time
Average salary per 100 workers

- $35.75/hour (inc on costs) x 4 x 52 x 100 staff = $743,000
Advocacy Strategy

Equipping Inclusion forum

- Public forum involving people with a disability, agencies, government, families

- Focus on:
  - agreeing on principles that should underpin government aids and equipment provision
  - discussion to prioritise a policy direction for reform
Advocacy Strategy

Equipping Inclusion forum

Principles to underpin govt aids & equipment provision

Budget equals demand:
Govt investment consistent with demand, and regularly adjusted to reflect demographic and technological changes.

Meets individual needs:
Responsive to individual need (and needs of families and carers), allow for choice and timely allocation appropriate to the individual.

Funding guaranteed against clear eligibility guidelines:
Must be security of entitlement, and eligibility criteria should be transparent.

Allows for life changes:
Allow for changes technology and in the life situations, needs and aspirations of individuals (families and carers).

Efficient systems:
Systems for the provision, maintenance and recycling of equipment should be
Advocacy Strategy

Equipping Inclusion forum

Discussion to prioritise a policy direction for reform

Explored 3 policy directions based on overseas policy approaches
1. An improved Aids & Equipment Program

- include the funding of aids and equipment based on a recognition of the needs and aspirations of people with a disability

- include a wider range of funded items (including aids and equipment relevant to whole-of-life activities)

- increase funding amounts.
2. ‘Equipment as of right’ funding scheme with lump sum periodic payments

- Pool aids and equipment funding sources together into a single combined allocation.

- Increase funding overall.

- Periodically allocate funding packages to individuals (to meet broadly defined aids and equipment needs).

- Individuals have control of how funds are spent on eligible items.
3. Individualised package of flexible and self-directed funds for whole of life (including equipment)

- integrate a range of funding programs into a single pool
- allocation is made to individuals to cover their life needs as determined by them
- individuals decide how to spend funds across their life needs.
Advocacy Strategy

Results of discussion of policy options

- interest in having options to choose an approach that best suited individual (ie. Elements of all policy approaches)

- not interested in finalising policy approach UNTIL enough money in the system to actually deliver results

=> 1st priority to lobby for increased government investment
Advocacy Strategy

Aids and Equipment Action Alliance

- Formed out of Equipping Inclusion Forum
- Membership of 20+ organisations
- Objectives
  - Achieve increased investment in the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program.
  - Ensure greater choice and equity for people with a disability in the way Aids and Equipment policies, programs, and supports are delivered
Advocacy Strategy

Key actions 2007

- Engage with State Government and Commonwealth Governments
- Finalise State and National membership and governance structures of the Alliance
- Foster an evidence base and information sharing
  - Support and initiate high quality research
  - Develop information systems to disseminate and build information on reissuing, recycling, refurbishment, cost of transport, program utilisation and other issues
- Develop strategies for changing community attitudes
- Make links to related advocacy in aged care.
Advocacy Strategy
- complementing a range of players

Some outcomes: Oct 06 - May 07

- pre-election lobbying led to State Govt commit to increased eligibility in VAEP and increased investment
  - include vehicle modifications
  - increase home modifications

- State budget May 07 further increase of $30.2 Million for aids and equipment
Advocacy Strategy

Future actions

- Lobby for release of Vic State Govt VAEP review
- Lobby Commonwealth govt re pre-election funding boosts
- Engage in CSTDA development
- Develop resources to summarise funds available and how to access.
- Collect evidence regarding needs and outcomes
Aids and Equipment Action Alliance

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