

NDIS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information Pack

**Low Cost Assistive Technology
August 2021**

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Introduction

This pack is designed to help participants, their families, carers and providers understand new flexible approach to purchasing low cost assistive technology.

We understand there is a lot of information, and some changes to the way the NDIS is being delivered during the pandemic, so we have created information packs like this one on specific topics.

We know that many services and supports have been impacted by COVID-19 – you might not be able to attend day programs, face to face therapy or receive the same level of in home care services. We know this can impact your wellbeing and the ability for many participants to access the services and supports included in their NDIS plans.

During the COVID-19 pandemic response, we are hearing about new ways providers are continuing to deliver services – some of these are online.

We recommend you start by working with your existing providers to discuss the best way to receive services and supports while maintaining physical distancing – this may include using available technology, developing exercise programs you can do at home or borrowing equipment and keeping in touch over the phone.

Your provider may also offer new programs and supports that you may be interested in and this is something you can discuss with them. Although your services and supports may look different at the moment, progress towards your plan goals should still be able to continue.

We've made some changes to ensure you can continue to get the services and supports you need – including using your NDIS funding to purchase low cost assistive technology like smart devices.

Always refer to the [NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits COVID Addendum](#) for the latest information on COVID-19 temporary support measures.

Telehealth and tele-practice

Some providers are using telehealth or tele-practice to deliver supports and services, particularly when government COVID-19 restrictions limit or don't allow you to meet face-to-face with your provider.

Telehealth and tele-practice can include:

- videoconferencing
- emails
- text messages
- telephone calls
- group chats
- sending video or photos.

It's important that you talk to your provider about the telehealth and tele-practice solutions that will work best for you.

Some specialised therapy supports may need to be completed in person (such as a wheelchair fitting or orthotics prescription). During COVID-19 lockdowns, you may only be allowed to access these services if it is urgent. Don't delay accessing these services while government COVID-19 rules permit you to meet face-to-face.

Some participants may have carers coming into their homes to provide services and support. These supports will most likely need to continue.

If your support workers cannot work with you because of government restrictions, your provider should be in touch with you to organise a replacement worker or carer to help you. It's important that you discuss what your essential needs are with your provider.

Wherever possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage you to maintain physical distancing and good hygiene practices and to follow the advice of the [Department of Health](#).

Internet and data

Internet connection and data are considered ordinary living costs (utilities) and you can't use your NDIS funding to pay for the internet in your home or the data you use on your phone.

Many internet and mobile companies like Telstra and Optus have offered free or discounted data during the coronavirus pandemic. Talk to your internet or data provider about what options might be available to you.

Accessible Telecoms is a free service to find independent and up-to-date information on telecommunication products and services that are suitable for people with disabilities. [Visit their website](#) or call them on 1800 029 904.

Low cost assistive technology

To help you continue to receive NDIS funded supports and services during this period, the NDIA has broadened the flexible approach to purchasing low cost assistive technology (AT). This allows you to buy low cost AT items you need, such as smart devices and fitness equipment, in consultation with your existing support providers.

The following information on flexible low cost AT doesn't apply if you need low cost AT to help you with functional activities related to your disability. For example, if you have a significant communication disability. In this case, more complex electronic devices and software applications may be appropriate and may cost more than the recommended \$750 limit on devices for this policy.

Visit the [Assistive technology guidelines](#) to learn more or discuss your disability-related assistive technology needs with your AT advisor, planner or local area coordinator.

You can use your existing NDIS funding to purchase low cost assistive technology if:

- it will **maintain funded NDIS supports** like a program, therapy or requirement (for example physiotherapy or Auslan interpreting provided via video conferencing), and
- your provider of supports **has confirmed in writing** the device is necessary to continue supports and services while maintaining physical distancing requirements, and
- it is the **lowest specification** that will maintain funded supports, and
- you **do not already have the item**, another suitable item or access to the item, and
- the item **has not been funded by another service system** (such as education), and
- the item or circumstances are **not specifically excluded**.

You are able to spend up to \$1500 on low cost AT items from your existing budgets.

We expect that participants should not need to spend more than \$750 on electronic devices to maintain existing services.

In the case of computer tablets for telehealth and care, or participating in online video classes, advice from AT specialists is that most NDIS participants will not need more than a standard tablet, which costs no more than \$600.

You can use your funding flexibly to purchase low cost AT using funding in your core - consumables budget. Plan-managed or self-managed participants can purchase these items from any provider and NDIA-managed participants can purchase these from any registered NDIS provider (this could include many therapy or support coordination providers).

You must make sure the written advice is provided to the NDIA – you can upload it to your participant record or ask your provider or plan manager to email it to the NDIA at enquiries@ndis.gov.au with a subject like 'Low cost AT flexibility evidence'. You and your provider should also keep a copy in case the NDIA requests it at a later date.

If you do not have funding available in your core budget for consumables you can use the funding in another core category flexibly to purchase a low cost AT item.

If you only have funding in your capacity building budget you can use the Low Cost AT-Support Capacity Building: 15_222400911_0124_1_3 support line item if you need to purchase low cost AT.

What is excluded from this policy?

NDIS funding cannot be used for:

- Any item that does not relate to the participant's disability or that doesn't help to maintain NDIS funded supports and services.
- Devices with specifications beyond the minimum needed.
- Smart phones, smart watches or tablets with mobile connections (e.g. 3G or 4G).
- Multiple devices.
- Replacements for loss or damage (unless you follow the NDIA process).
- Utility costs (e.g. power or internet connection).
- Software.
- Additional hardware or accessories (apart from an appropriate protective case).
- Purchase of items when rental options may be appropriate for the COVID-19 period.

What can I buy?

First, you should discuss with your service provider the best way to continue receiving services and supports while maintaining physical distancing or following government stay at home rules. This may include using equipment and devices you already have, following printed exercise programs at home or borrowing equipment and keeping in touch over the phone.

You should also check to see that you have sufficient funds in your plan to cover the equipment you are considering. The NDIA will not increase plan values to accommodate the purchase of a device under this policy.

If there is a specific item that you and your provider agree will help you maintain supports during the physical distancing period, your provider will need to provide written advice before you make a purchase. This could be for fitness equipment you would usually use as part of a group program, or a minimum specification tablet to maintain supports from your therapy service provider.

You also need to make sure that you follow the policy criteria:

- you need the equipment to maintain funded (existing) NDIS supports, and
- your support provider has confirmed in writing that this equipment is necessary to maintain funded NDIS supports, and
- the item is the lowest specification that will maintain funded supports, and
- you do not have access to the item, and
- the item is not funded through a different support system, and
- no other exclusions apply.

You must provide written advice to the NDIA – you can upload it to your participant record or ask your provider or plan manager to email it to the NDIA at enquiries@ndis.gov.au.

You should ensure any low cost AT you buy meets your needs, helps you pursue your goals and is value for money.

You should also compare prices of similar supports or the cost of the same items from different providers to make sure you are getting the best value.

Consider the following when deciding on how much to pay for a support:

- Value for money: Is the cost of the support reasonable when you think about the benefit you will get?
- Quality: Is the quality of the item right and will it help you pursue your goals?
- Budget: How much funding do you have available in your NDIS plan and can you afford the amount of support you need within your budget?

What if I don't have enough money in my plan?

The intent of this policy is to help participants continue therapy and supports due to physical distancing requirements associated with COVID-19.

This policy is not intended to support participants in starting new supports that weren't in place before physical distancing restrictions were put into place.

You should use existing funds to pay for low cost AT.

Additional funds will not be added to your plan just for these purchases. We expect you to use your existing budget to cover these costs.

If your plan does not have sufficient funds for ongoing supports, you should follow the usual process for a [plan review](#). The NDIA will not accept requests to change a plan solely to purchase low cost AT under this policy.

Resources

There are a number of [questions and answers about the low cost AT policy](#) on the coronavirus pages of the NDIS website, including a video and easy read translation.

[The NDIS website](#) will continue to be updated with general information, and information about COVID-19 and how it relates to the NDIS.

Find out more about telecommunications products and services by [visiting Accessible Telecoms](#).