

Press Release

Deakin University today launched a report, which shows that people with disabilities lack vital equipment (assistive technology - AT) to assist them to participate in life.

The *Equipping Inclusion Studies*, an evaluation of the equipment need and cost effectiveness of a range of enablers for Victorians living with disabilities.

Deakin University's Associate Researcher, Natasha Layton said the study investigated factors that affect the capacity of Victorians with a disability to be mobile and active in their daily lives and to participate.

"The Equipping Inclusion Studies shows that assistive technology is critical for people with a disability to enable them to reach their potential"

"There is an unmet need for people with a disability, and a strong social justice argument for more assistive technology," she said.

Co-researcher Professor Rob Carter said this is the first time a comprehensive economic evaluation of the total packages of care for persons with a disability has been compared with the benefits across all life area.

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner Dr Helen Szoke said while launching the report today that people with a disability have every right to be given every opportunity to participate fully in their communities.

"The report clearly shows that there is more work to be done in terms of equipping people with a disability with the tools to achieve their best," Dr Szoke said.

"The Commission is keen to see agencies work together to address the unmet needs for people with a disability living in Victoria, she said.

Significant findings include:

- 75% of people surveyed had unmet need for assistive technology solutions (devices, personal care and/or environmental modification)
- People living with disabilities require an average of eight assistive technology devices to participate in life
- Best outcomes occur when people are supported to construct their own individual solution which for most people includes devices, personal care, and environmental modifications.
- As the elements of enabling solutions are funded separately, Victorians struggle to navigate through a complex current service system
- Substantial elements of AT cost are carried by funders other than the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program
- For many Victorians, key elements of AT are not provided at all through any funder
- From a government affordability perspective, important improvements can be achieved at modest cost for many AT clients.
- The lack of a 'safety net' provision in the VAEP subsidy program means, for many Victorians, cumulative co-payment costs are unreachable.
- Lack of assistive technology is a major barrier to the achievement of participation as detailed in international, national and state disability policies.

The Equipping Inclusion Studies comprise an *Equipment Study* and an *Economic Study*, and are the result of 2.5 years of research funded by the William Buckland Foundation, auspiced by Victoria's Aids and Equipment Action Alliance.

Copies of the report including key findings and policy implications are available at www.aeea.org.au