

WELCOME

to our April 2020 newsletter

Are AT Businesses an Essential Service?

ATSNZ has consulted with the Ministry of Health (via the Deputy Director General of Disability Adri Isbister), Accessable (via the CEO Graham Walling and the procurement manager Richard Parker) and Enable (via the acting CEO Greg Brogden and the procurement manager Gavin Eades) to establish whether Assistive Technology suppliers are deemed providers of essential services under the COVID-19 approach to contain the infectious disease.

Our request to Adri Isbister was a straightforward question that was supported by the statement that many of the AT products support some of our most vulnerable citizens, keeping people out of hospital or helping them discharge from hospital more rapidly. We saw this opinion reflected in the principles shared with us by Accessable & Enable in their most recent supplier communications.

Principles underpinning the definition of essential service to the health and disability system include:

- Keep people at home living safely
- Keep people out of hospital where we can
- Where possible get people home from hospital quickly
- Respond to crisis / urgent / acute physical and mental health needs
- To avoid harm to people's mental wellbeing.

In the letter from Adri Isbister, circulated to ATSNZ members, the MOH's directive is that:

- Equipment and Modification Services (EMS) that are essential include the provision and repair of essential disability equipment and communication equipment according to the principles above.
- Non-essential home modifications will be deferred. Any urgent and essential access modifications such as modular ramping and rails to allow for access to a person's home could be considered where a long term need for this has been identified (the person has a long term disability and will need this support for at least 6 months, and is likely to continue living in their home for 2-3 years).
- Vehicles and vehicle modifications are not considered essential.

Enable circulated a letter to suppliers indicating Enable's decision around whether supplier products fall under the essential equipment or not, following the same principles as above. Their advice was the following:

An essential disability service should be any service providing direct support that maintains a person's necessities of life. The focus is on keeping people living safely in their home. If in doubt, ask yourself: if this service was not provided would the person be at risk of serious harm or hospitalisation. The workforce that deliver those essential services are considered essential workforce, including any suppliers contracted to support this outcome.

What is deemed as an essential piece of equipment will be a decision made by clinicians or health professionals such as an Occupational Therapist. If suppliers are not currently listed as providing essential equipment to Enable, they are however asked to be on standby should a request for any of their products occur, to help Enable keep the process running smoothly and efficiently.

Accessible has taken a different approach to securing supply chains by analysing what is currently in stock, both in their own premises and amongst suppliers, and what they estimate might be required in the next few months. They intend to purchase forward the product they estimate that will be required and, in many cases, have the supplier hold on to it until such time it is requested through the clinicians.

In conclusion, AT suppliers are required to remain open to supply essential equipment. Whether equipment is deemed essential, will be assessed by health professionals (including Professional advisers).

The question to the MoH that remains unanswered relates to direct purchase by consumers. This falls under non-essential unless evidence can be provided that the purchase is based on the same principles stated by the MoH.

Response to our request for official information

We recently received a letter saying - Thank you for your request to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) of 9 March 2020 under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) for:

“Can you please point me in the direction of where I can access information on the 2020 budgeted spend and 2019 and 2018 actual spend on Disability equipment, broken down into regions (or districts) and types of spend, i.e. new equipment and refurbishments, and types of equipment. Any level of further granularity would be appreciated, to help with an overview of the market.”

The information received shows the expenditure on disability equipment which is funded through Equipment and Modification Services (EMS). The data has been provided by financial year ending 30 June for 2018 and 2019. Data for the 2020 financial year is as at 31 December 2019.

Table 1 presents actual expenditure by equipment type for each financial year.

Table 2 presents the actual expenditure by district health board (DHB) for each financial year.

Table 3 presents the actual expenditure by client age groups for each financial year.

Table 4 presents actual expenditure, on refurbished equipment by financial year.

We requested this information to get access to Ministry of Health spend on equipment to improve our market insight. The report is available by request (email ingrid@atsnz.org.nz).

We have asked for the same information from ACC and are waiting for their response, which has also been put into the OID process.

The report is a start to acquiring information that is useful to us as a sector. We can ask for further information and it is our intention to request updates as time progresses.

Opportunity for partnerships

ATSNZ has been approached by two people who are looking for potential partners in the industry. Ask Ingrid for contact details if interested in talking to the people mentioned below.

Daniela Heiberger, Content Marketing Manager for R & E Stricker Reha-Entwicklungen GmbH is looking for a New Zealand partner. They are a family business who build high-quality hand bikes. It's their mission to enable people with disabilities around the globe to live an independent life as much as possible.

Tim Stewart, AbilitytoTravel, who was exhibiting the ATTO freedom scooter at Show Your Ability is looking to be put in touch with potential distributors.

Meet our members



Each newsletter we hope to introduce our members to each other through the interview questions posted below.

Introducing Judy Wallace - A1 Wheelchairs

What is your company's area of specialty?

A1 Wheelchairs are suppliers of Magic Mobility powerchairs, Mounting Systems, Wheel On Scales, Assistive Technology and rental equipment. We are subcontracted to Enable NZ and Accessable for equipment repairs, maintenance, setup, servicing, modifications, customisations, assessment, replacement, deliveries, collections and technical assistance for OT's for the greater Manawatu region and also provide services for hospitals, rest homes, care facilities, MOE and private clients.

Most of you will know us as we are regularly working with other suppliers calling on them for their parts, support or training to help us do our job, and also supporting them, with their equipment, delivery, trials, set up etc...



When things go back to (near) normal if you are in Palmerston North please call in and see us. We'd love to see you, if you need a break in your travel at any time. We have clean toilets and a comfortable staffroom that we are happy to share. We have recently moved and can now also help with a scripting/meeting room or a conference/training room if needed.

Where do you see our sector in 5 years?

Gosh, ask me that just a few weeks ago and this would have been much easier to answer. The current situation is a challenging time for us all and as this is all new to us, it's hard to predict the long term effects it may have but let's be positive, accept the challenge, take each day as it comes, do what we can to help each other and I am sure we will all come out stronger and more united.

Can you please share a recent success you have had with a client and one of your products?

From a client - how Magic is this!

"I live on a 26-acre lifestyle block. I needed a rugged chair that will get me around my land, checking my animals and pest traps. I wanted something that could handle hills, rough tracks, rocks, and a robust country life. (My OT) was legitimately concerned for my safety, as she had known I had dropped, flipped and tipped my previous chair over. From the moment they brought the trial chair and I went down the central race of my farm, I did not want to get out (of it). I couldn't wait for my own magic to arrive. It made me feel free, it made me feel like running and dancing, it made me feel alive.

(Now) I feel safe, I know I can go uphill and down dale and reach all corners of my farm without risk of tipping the chair over and killing myself. It has absolutely empowered me to be more independent, as I know I am safe and (it) will get me there and back. It has been life changing, it has given me a second life, instead of being fearful and staying at home, you simply can't stop me now I am moving all day long. It had been literally decades since I had smelt the smells of the Bush and seeing varieties of trees I have not seen for many a long year. It made my heart sing and brought back many memories of hunting and exploring the native forests of Northland.

I get up in the morning into my magic chair, and I don't come back in the house until bedtime. Being outside rain or sun with my animals, the wildlife, the birds is my reason for living. I have llamas which I use in fund raising for various organisations such as the Cancer Society or the SPCA. I take them to rest homes to lift the spirits of the old folk.

The Magic chair, has improved my health quite noticeably, as I would prefer to be in the chair than on my bed. It is physically much better for me, let alone mentally and spiritually. Having the ability to be outdoors with my animals, has made me stronger physically and emotionally and made my life worth living again."

If you could change one thing about our sector, what would it be?

I would love to see us more united and with other sectors too and I think that the formation of ATSNZ is aiding and bringing this more and more each day, week, meeting, newsletter....

What's the best piece of advice you have ever received?

Treasure each moment with your children, they grow up real fast.
Yep - my baby girl Stevie doesn't want to sit on my knee anymore (she's 30)

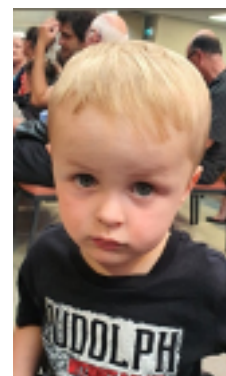
What do you enjoy most about working in the industry?

The people, the people, the people...

What's the last thing that made you laugh out loud?

I pretty much laugh out loud many times each day but two of my favourites recently:

(Prior to the lockdown)- I spotted my 3 year old grandson in our driveway out of our gate talking to the horses in the neighbours paddock after yelling at him to come back at once! he was promptly retrieved and marched home by his older sister berating him all the way (she is 5) As a good nana I stood firmly in front of my grandson who was looking so adorable but totally innocent/guilty and shocked, I sternly asked him " ARCHIE! WHAT MADE YOU go out of that gate!!" To which he replied with big round eyes. "Nana, the wind blew me..."



And the other... The Beatles Corvid 19, I Gotta Wash my hands



Click play to watch the video in YouTube.