

# Position Statement on Holistic Specialist Assessment

February 2015

## Our position

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is one of the most significant single reforms in disability policy in Australia's history. The NDIS has the potential to empower people who are blind or vision impaired, as well as people with disability more generally, on a scale like never before by providing the freedom of choice and control over the services and supports they need to fully participate in the community as equal citizens. Major reforms in aged care are also moving towards person-centred service provision through Home Care and Home Support. The effectiveness of aged care reforms are particularly relevant to people who are blind or vision impaired given the majority of this population group are aged over sixty-five and ineligible for NDIS support.

However, in order for people who are blind or vision impaired to be empowered by a shift to person-centred support, it is of utmost importance to ensure participants have access to specific and appropriate information to assist with making an informed decision. It is also essential in a fiscally constrained environment to ensure that people are not arbitrarily locked out from support, by decisions about the severity of need based on medical diagnosis rather than functional need.

Vision 2020 Australia considers it is critical for consumers who are blind or vision impaired seeking support through the NDIS or aged care, to have access to a holistic specialist assessment both at the time of application and during support planning.

Holistic specialist assessment means a general assessment undertaken by a trained professional or team of professionals with specialist expertise in blindness and vision impairment, with a view to the holistic person and their goals and aspirations across a broad spectrum of clinical and functional outcome areas. A holistic specialist assessment may occur in conjunction with or in addition to a specialist assessment undertaken in response to a specific clinical or functional need or other general assessment. Reports provided by holistic specialist assessors should be considered in determining an individual's eligibility to NDIS and aged care programs, and in determining an individual's support plan.

Vision 2020 Australia therefore seeks the inclusion of the following elements into the operations of the NDIS and the My Aged Care Gateway as soon as possible:

1. The establishment of a mechanism to streamline the transactional outsourcing of holistic specialist assessments to appropriate providers
2. The inclusion of a registration process to accredit authorised entities to undertake holistic specialist assessments to ensure adequate consumer safeguards with regards to quality, consistency, reporting and provider remuneration
3. The inclusion into standard operating procedure the option of undertaking a holistic specialist assessment and/or other specialist or general assessments for individuals identified as blind or vision impaired during application and support planning; and
4. The safeguarding of the principle of consumer choice and control by ensuring holistic specialist assessments are not mandatory.

This position has been endorsed by the Vision 2020 Australia Independence and Participation Committee (IPC). For more information on the IPC and member representation, please visit [www.vision2020australia.org.au](http://www.vision2020australia.org.au).

## Context

In Australia, it is estimated that more than 575,000 people are currently blind or have vision loss, projected to grow to over 800,000 by 2020<sup>i</sup>. This rapid increase is due to the ageing population and the fact that the risk of vision loss increases three-fold for each decade over the age of forty. The situation is worse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with six times the rate of blindness and three times the rate of vision impairment in comparison to the general population.

The annual economic cost attributable to blindness and vision impairment is estimated to be \$16 billion, with the social and personal cost to individuals and their families further adding to the impact on Australian communities. In comparison to the general population, people who are blind or vision impaired have more than four times the rate of unemployment, suffer twice as many falls, have three times the risk of depression, are admitted to residential care three years earlier and often lose confidence to independently manage everyday life. However the fact is with the right services and supports, people living with blindness or vision impairment can develop skills to remain independent, participate in the community and live the life they choose.

## About Vision 2020 Australia

Established in October 2000, Vision 2020 Australia is part of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, a global initiative of the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. Vision 2020 Australia is the peak body for the eye health and vision care sector, representing over 50 member organisations involved in: local and global eye care; health promotion; low vision support; vision rehabilitation; eye research; professional assistance and community support.

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<sup>i</sup> Access Economics, 'Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009' 2010