



Disability Support Services

Discussion Document to support consultation on:

- Consistent and Transparent Assessment and Allocation Tools
- Fairer, More Consistent Flexible Funding

Foreword from the Minister for Disability Issues

Disability Support Services (DSS) provide crucial supports to around 50,000 disabled New Zealanders. The service aims to address the barriers disabled people face so they have the opportunity to live an everyday life. It also supports around 100,000 New Zealanders with equipment modification services that are needed to engage with everyday life.

Our Government is determined to build a fair, sustainable, high-quality disability support system that delivers better outcomes for disabled people based on their needs.

DSS currently suffers from persistent and unresolved issues that stand in the way of achieving this objective.

In August 2024 an [Independent Review](#)¹ found there had been unsustainable spending increases and a lack of fairness and transparency around what support disabled people can access. It identified variability in the value of support packages across New Zealand, and a number of supports that are only available in some regions or areas. The Review also determined that current policy settings and service design do not allow DSS to be administered or delivered effectively.

An earlier stocktake by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet found long-standing issues in DSS with ageing business practices, weak assurance, audit and monitoring functions, and at-risk legacy IT systems.

We are taking the crucial initial steps to lay the foundations for stable, predictable and consistent services for disabled people. To do this, we need to hear from disabled people who receive DSS and the other people in your lives who provide care and support to make sure the system supports you to live a good life.

We are also working on important operational improvements, such as to pricing tools for residential care, and for other DSS supports. We will engage with the broader disability sector – particularly Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination (NASC) organisations and DSS contracted providers – on this work.

These initial steps to stabilise the system will provide the foundations for a later phase of work which will focus on strengthening DSS. This strengthening phase will involve consideration of systemwide realignment of DSS, including issues such as the pathway to consistent national delivery of Enabling Good Lives (EGL) principles in DSS, and a legislative framework to underpin DSS. Again, the insights and perspectives of disabled people and the disabled community will be critical for this work.

Thank you for your time.

Hon Louise Upston

Minister for Disability Issues

1. <https://www.disabilitysupport.govt.nz/taskforce/independent-review>

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Introduction from the Deputy Chief Executive, Disability Support Services

The DSS Taskforce was established in September 2024 to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review. The Taskforce's work aims to stabilise the disability support system, and to ensure future spending can be kept within the budget allocated for it each year. The Taskforce will work closely with disabled people, carers, whānau, community groups, service providers, and Government to ensure a sustainable Disability Support Services (DSS) system into the future.

In our first round of consultation at the end of 2024, over 1,500 people told us their views on the future of DSS. We heard the system is confusing, inconsistent and that the March 18 2024 decisions undermined trust and confidence in the system. This feedback has informed our policy work and options which is what we are now consulting on.

Policy work has identified options to stabilise the DSS system in the near-term by making changes to the allocations process and accessing and administering flexible funding. The options are designed to provide clarity and confidence in how the system works for disabled people, their carers and whānau within current funding levels. At the same time introduce a greater level of visibility to support outcomes and ensure the ongoing affordability of DSS into the future.

The first area we want to hear from you about is how we can make our assessment and allocation processes clearer.

We have received consistent feedback as to the effect of the changes made to flexible funding in March 2024. We know that isn't working, so the second area we want your thoughts on are proposed criteria for access to flexible funding and changes to how the funding is used. There are two options for how these changes could be made:

- Option one links each person's flexible funding to a plan.
- Option two is to amend the current purchasing rules.

We want a system where disabled people can access fair, consistent and transparent services and supports that are affordable.

We appreciate your participation in this consultation. Your insights will help us to better understand and consider these very important supports and services and the impact of the options we are proposing.

Chris Bunny

Deputy Chief Executive
Disability Support Services

Summary

Scope of consultation

There are many different services and supports available to disabled people. These are delivered by a number of different government agencies – some through DSS administered by a dedicated business unit within the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and others through health, education and welfare agencies and Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). This consultation is intended to focus on DSS. These are accessed after an assessment from a Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination (NASC) organisation, or an Enabling Good Lives (EGL) site.

Have your say

This consultation will inform recommendations to the Government about how to stabilise the DSS system. Those recommendations will lay the foundations to strengthen the system so that it is sustainable, consistent, transparent and fair.

Appendix 1 provides full details on the ways you can provide feedback on this consultation, as well as how your information will be used and released, and contact details for enquiries.

How to use this document

This discussion document explains why we are consulting with you and outlines options. We ask you some questions about each option which you can answer as part of your submission. You can choose which questions you answer, you don't have to answer them all.

Next steps

A summary of engagement will be published on the DSS website www.disabilitysupport.govt.nz. All responses will be anonymised, but a list of submitters may be provided. Please clearly indicate in your submission if you do not wish your name, or any other personal information, to be included in any summary of submissions that MSD may publish.

Background

Disability Support Services (DSS) is responsible for providing essential disability support to around 50,000 disabled people and their whānau, as well as environmental supports, including equipment and modification services, for approximately 100,000 New Zealanders.

Following an Independent Review of DSS in 2024, the Disability Support Services Taskforce was established to implement the Review's recommendations. The report of the Independent Review (including alternate formats) is available here: [Independent Review into Disability Support Services.](#)¹

The current priority of the Taskforce is to stabilise DSS by making it fairer, more transparent, easier to understand and more consistent for disabled people within current funding levels.

This is the second stage of our consultation. We previously ran a survey with the disabled community and sector between 29 October - 22 November 2024. The questions we asked and a summary of the submissions from that consultation are available on the DSS website.

¹ <https://www.disabilitysupport.govt.nz/taskforce/independent-review>

Topic 1: Improving the way the needs of disabled people are assessed, and how support is allocated

What we want to achieve

We want to make sure disabled people's needs are assessed in the same way. We also want to ensure there is more consistency and fairness in the decisions about what support is provided.

Why change is needed

We know that DSS does not always provide a fair or consistent level of support and it is not always what is needed. The support provided is not always reviewed or reassessed as often as it should be, and reviews are sometimes not as thorough as they should be. Responses to our 2024 survey reinforced these concerns.

What we are proposing

We want to make changes to improve the existing tools that are used to assess peoples' needs and make decisions about what support they receive. This will help stabilise the DSS system.

1.1 Improve existing NASC assessment tools and processes

We are considering all or some of the following changes to improve the current approach to NASC assessments. EGL assessments are not included at this stage.

Proposal 1: Make sure there is a consistent Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination (NASC) approach

We propose requiring every NASC assessor to use an updated tool and introduce checks to make sure that different NASCs and different assessors are making similar allocations when assessing disabled people who have similar support needs.

Consultation question:

1. What changes can you suggest that would ensure the assessment tool and process is fair, consistent, and transparent? You might for instance wish to suggest it is: done in a different place; in person, or not; that it be supported differently; or that you receive different information about it before or after the assessment occurs.

Proposal 2: Improve how the assessment tool reflects the diversity of disability

We want to improve how the assessment tool can identify the diverse needs of disabled people. We also want the tool to work well for New Zealanders, recognising their culture or age, and other characteristics. The tool needs to help assessors understand disabled people's specific situations and needs to ensure that the funding and support each disabled person receives is fair and consistent.

Consultation question:

2. What information does the assessment tool need to gather about you and your circumstances to ensure it can identify the support you need?

Proposal 3: Assess the needs of family/whānau and carers

We propose that family/whānau and carer support needs are considered alongside those of the disabled person. This means that family/whānau and carer assessments would consider how much support is being provided by the carer, what that support involves, and link them to the respite and/or other supports that are needed.

Consultation questions:

3. Do you support the needs of carers being specifically assessed alongside those of the disabled person? Why/Why not?
4. What considerations in respect to a carer's situation should be taken into account in order to link them to, or provide, the support needed?

Proposal 4: Make sure that the services and support a person receives continues to meet their needs.

Needs assessment reviews and reassessments should ensure supports and services are the best fit for the disabled person and their family/whānau and carers. We want to ensure we are not over-assessing and creating additional burden and uncertainty. But it is also important to update supports and services in a timely manner.

We want to make sure it is clear what a disabled person can expect from DSS, and that the support received is clearly linked to their disability related needs and continues to reflect their changing needs. We are proposing an approach that will consider both the

individual's needs, and the support they are currently receiving (e.g. from family / whānau and carers).

Consultation questions:

5. How often have your needs and services / supports been reviewed or reassessed?
6. What changes to your circumstances do you think should mean a review or reassessment of your services / supports would be needed?
7. How often do you think your services / supports need to be reviewed or reassessed? (for instance, every year, every two years, every three years, or every five years).

Proposal 5: Helping you access appropriate support

We know that people apply for, or receive support, from DSS that they could receive, or may be eligible for, from other government agencies. This can put pressure on DSS funding.

DSS has never been intended to fund services that are provided through other agencies. However, in reality, the boundaries between different agency services' are often unclear. Some services are available in some regions, but not others, and may be available only to some individuals, or in some circumstances. This can be confusing and is difficult for disabled people and their carers to know the right place to receive the necessary support.

We propose ensuring that assessors identify to the disabled person and their carers the relevant supports and services that are available through other agencies or organisations and provide guidance on how these can be accessed. This will help ensure that DSS is only used for the supports and services that are not provided elsewhere.

Consultation question:

8. What information or support will help you access the services, beyond DSS, that you might be eligible for?

Topic 2: Accessing flexible funding, and how it can be used

What we want to achieve

We want to ensure that disabled people and their carers that can and want to manage their own budgets, can access flexible funding and use it to meet their particular needs.

We want to improve the transparency of the flexible funding system so that Government and DSS users can have confidence that flexible funding is being allocated on a fair basis and is support outcomes that it is provided for.

We need to ensure that flexible funding is being used consistently when it is the best way for a disabled person to receive their support.

We also need to ensure that DSS clients who do not use flexible funding also receive a fair and consistent level of support.

Why change is needed

Many disabled people and carers have told us that accessing flexible funding has improved their lives. But for many disabled people recent changes to flexible funding has reduced flexibility that allows them to meet their needs in the way that works best for them. Many have also questioned whether the current rules-based approach (in the purchasing guidelines) is the best approach for flexible funding. The list of items that can, or cannot, be purchased, and other rules set out in the guidelines, is hard to understand and follow, and does not provide enough flexibility.

We have also heard feedback that flexible funding is not the best way to support some disabled people. Some people find flexible funding good for some support needs but want other support provided differently (usually a DSS contracted provider).

There is a lack of transparency about what flexible funding is and can be used for. This makes it difficult for those allocated flexible funding to know whether the amount allocated to them is the amount they are entitled to and makes it difficult to be assured that flexible funding is being used effectively and is improving outcomes.

What we are proposing

We are proposing two broad changes from the way flexible funding currently operates:

1. Changing how flexible funding can be used; and
2. Introducing criteria for accessing flexible funding.

Proposal 6: Change how flexible funding can be used to make it clearer on what it can and can't be used for

We are proposing to make changes to how flexible funding can be used. An important aspect to this will be making the rules and guidance material easy to understand and easy to follow. This would include alternate formats.

Outlined below are two different options for setting out how flexible funding can be used.

Option 1 – Link flexible funding to the person's plan, with oversight of how it is used

This option would provide choice and control for the disabled person in how they use flexible funding to fund the support they need, but with increased transparency of the way the money is spent, and the outcomes it is helping to achieve. This would be done by:

- Requiring an up-to-date plan that sets out the outcomes sought and the support needs of the disabled person, how the flexible funding will be used, and why it is the best option to address the support needs to help the person live a good life.
- Making it clear that the disabled person or their agent is responsible for using flexible funding in line with the agreed plan to support the outcomes identified in the plan.
- Setting in place periodic reviews to confirm the plan is still appropriate and flexible funding is being used to work towards the plan.

A plan would likely include what the flexible funding is expected to be used for – which would include regular daily support (such as support with preparing and cleaning up after meals) and things that focus on personal goals or changes in a person's situation (such as support for learning how to cook in anticipation of moving into an independent living situation). It would include how the funding is expected to be used to meet that support need (such as by paying wages for a support person), and what other options might be available to meet that support need. It would also note any changes to how the funding is used over time.

Option 2 – Adjust current lists of what can and can't be funded using flexible funding

This option is similar to the current approach to flexible funding by retaining the approach of determining through rules and guidelines what flexible funding can and cannot be used for. This option would involve:

- Defining a list of products and services that flexible funding can be used for.
- Defining a list of products that flexible funding cannot be used for.
- Set spending limits for individual products and services.
- Create guidance on what supports are funded elsewhere and require these to be explored prior to considering the exceptions process outlined below.
- Introduce an exceptions process that allows for flexibility to buy supports that are not included in the list of what flexible funding can be used for, or on the list of what flexible funding cannot be used for, on a case-by-case basis.

Consultation questions:

9. Do you prefer Option 1 (link flexible funding to the person's plan, with oversight of how it is used) or Option 2 (adjust current lists of what can and can't be funded using flexible funding)? Why?
10. Do you have any suggestions on how flexible funding can be used to allow disabled people and carers as much choice, control and flexibility as possible, while still providing transparency and assurance the funding is being used effectively, and is supporting outcomes?

Proposal 7: Introduce criteria to access flexible funding

We are considering introducing one or more of the following access criteria for flexible funding. We are not suggesting that all the below criteria would have to be met for someone to access flexible funding.

- The use of flexible funding is part of an agreed plan and clearly linked to the impairment-related need.
- Disabled people and/or their agents² can manage the responsibilities of flexible funding.
- Flexible funding will be used to purchase a service or support that DSS provides through its contracted services/supports, that will address a person's disability-related support, and there is an advantage to using flexible funding to purchase it (such as greater flexibility for scheduling, it is closer to where the person lives etc).

² Some disabled people ask another person to manage flexible funding on their behalf – these people are known as agents.

- Flexible funding will address a service gap, where the service is either not available, or the available service is not suitable for the individual.
- The cost of the support(s) or service(s) that will be funded is not more expensive than other ways to get that support.
- The flexible funding will enable the person to purchase or access a service that is expected to reduce a person's future support needs.

Consultation questions:

11. Do you support the introduction of criteria for receiving flexible funding? Please let us know why, or why not?

12. Which of the following criteria for receiving flexible funding do you agree or disagree should be included and why? (choose all that you think should apply).

- 12a Use of flexible funding is part of an agreed plan and linked to a specific need.
- 12b Disabled people and/or their family / whānau / carers are able to manage the responsibilities of flexible funding.
- 12c Flexible funding will be used to purchase a service or support that DSS provides through its contracted services/supports, that will address a person's disability-related support, and there is an advantage to using flexible funding to purchase it (such as greater flexibility for scheduling, it is closer to where the person lives etc).
- 12d Flexible funding will address a service gap, where the service is not otherwise available, or suitable for the individual.
- 12e The cost of the support or service that will be funded is not more expensive than other ways to get that support.
- 12f The flexible funding will enable the person to purchase or access a service that is expected to reduce a person's future support needs.

13. Can you suggest other criteria for accessing flexible funding in addition to, or instead of, those above? If you have suggestions, please explain why you think they will be helpful for those who are accessing flexible funding.

Appendix 1: How to have your say

Making a submission

The consultation is open from Monday, 10 February until 5pm Monday 24 March 2025.

You can make a submission by:

- completing the submission form and emailing it to: DSS_submissions@msd.govt.nz
- completing an audio or video submission and emailing it to: NZSL_submissions@msd.govt.nz
- completing an online survey at: [Ministry of Social Development Consultation Hub - Citizen Space \(msd.govt.nz\)](https://www.msd.govt.nz/consultation/citizen-space)
- mailing your submission to:
c/o Disability Support Services, Ministry of Social Development, PO Box 1556,
Wellington 6140, New Zealand

We will also be running public consultation sessions around New Zealand and online. Details of these sessions can be found at www.disabilitysupport.govt.nz

If you have any questions about this process please contact:
info@disabilitysupport.govt.nz

Use and release of information

Information provided through this consultation will help us develop policy advice to Ministers on improvements to DSS.

It is important you understand that people can request access to submissions under the Official Information Act 1982. Please make it clear in the beginning of your submission if you don't want your submission to be released, which parts you don't want released and why. We may get in touch with you if there is an Official Information Act request. If you have any questions about this, please contact info@disabilitysupport.govt.nz.

Private information

The Privacy Act 2020 establishes certain principles with respect to the collection, use and disclosure of information about individuals by various agencies, including MSD. Any personal information you supply to MSD in the course of making a submission will only be used for the purpose of assisting in the development of advice in relation to this consultation, for contacting you about your submission, or to advise you of the outcome of the consultation, including any next steps. We may also use personal information you supply in the course of making a submission for other reasons permitted under the Privacy Act (e.g. with your consent, for a directly related purpose, or where the law permits or requires it). Please clearly indicate in your submission if you do not wish your

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name, or any other personal information, to be included in any summary of submissions that MSD may publish.

We will only retain personal information as long as it is required for the purposes for which the information may lawfully be used. Where any information provided (which may include personal information) constitutes public records, it will be retained to the extent required by the Public Records Act 2005. We may also be required to disclose information under the Official Information Act, to a Parliamentary Select Committee or Parliament in response to a Parliamentary Question. You have rights of access to and correction of your personal information which can be found on the MSD website at <https://consultations.msd.govt.nz/>.

Appendix 2: Full set of consultation questions

You can choose which questions you answer and don't have to answer them all.

1. What changes can you suggest that would ensure the assessment tool and process is fair, consistent, and transparent? You might for instance wish to suggest it is: done in a different place; in person, or not; that it be supported differently; or that you receive different information about it before or after the assessment occurs.
2. What information does the assessment tool need to gather about you and your circumstances to ensure it can identify the support you need?
3. Do you support the needs of carers being specifically assessed alongside those of the disabled person? Why/Why not?
4. What considerations in respect to a carer's situation should be taken into account in order to link them to, or provide, the support needed?
5. How often have your needs and services / supports been reviewed or reassessed?
6. What changes to your circumstances do you think should mean a review or reassessment of your services / supports would be needed?
7. How often do you think your services / supports need to be reviewed or reassessed? (for instance, every year, every two years, every three years, or every five years).

8. What information or support might NASCs provide that will help you access the services, beyond DSS, that you might be eligible for?

9. Do you prefer Option 1 (link flexible funding to the person's plan, with oversight of how it is used) or Option 2 (adjust current lists of what can and can't be funded using flexible funding)? Why?

10. Do you have any suggestions on how flexible funding can be used to allow disabled people and carers as much choice, control and flexibility as possible, while still providing transparency and assurance the funding is being used effectively, and is supporting outcomes?

11. Do you support the introduction of criteria for receiving flexible funding? Please let us know why, or why not?

12. Which of the following criteria for receiving flexible funding do you agree or disagree should be included and why? (choose all that you think should apply).
 - 12a Use of flexible funding is part of an agreed plan and linked to a specific need.
Agree/Disagree
Why/Why not?

 - 12b Disabled people and/or their family / whānau / carers are able to manage the responsibilities of flexible funding.
Agree/Disagree
Why/Why not?

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12c Flexible funding will be used to purchase a service or support that DSS provides through its contracted services/supports, that will address a person's disability-related support, and there is an advantage to using flexible funding to purchase it (such as greater flexibility for scheduling, it is closer to where the person lives etc).

Agree/Disagree

Why/Why not?

12d Flexible funding will address a service gap, where the service is not otherwise available, or suitable for the individual.

Agree/Disagree

Why/Why not?

12e The cost of the support or service that will be funded is not more expensive than other ways to get that support.

Agree/Disagree

Why/Why not?

12f The flexible funding will enable the person to purchase or access a service that is expected to reduce a person's future support needs.

Agree/Disagree

Why/Why not?

13. Can you suggest other criteria for accessing flexible funding in addition to, or instead of, those above? If you have suggestions, please explain why you think they will be helpful for those who are accessing flexible funding.