Meeting the needs of People with Disabilities in Rural and Remote WA

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Outline

• Disability Services Commission
• Journey of services
• Who is involved
• The Memorandum of Understanding
• Regions covered by the partnership
• How it works
• Outcomes and challenges
• Recommendations
Disability Services Commission

- Medium sized State Government department
- Budget - $540 million
- State & Commonwealth funding
- Support to over 21,500 people
- Staffing – approximately 1,700 FTE
- 62% of budget used to purchase services from non government organisations
Disability Services Commission

• First department of its kind in Australia;
• Established in 1993 under the Disability Services Act
• Minister
• Board, and
• Ministerial Advisory Council.
Disability Services Commission

Vision

All people live in welcoming communities that ensure citizenship and participation for everyone, as well as friendship, mutual support and a fair go.
Eligibility Criteria for Commission Services

- Access to:
  - Commission roles and functions that apply to all people with disabilities
  - Funded and provided disability services based on assessment of need
  - Commission provided services (for persons with intellectual disability)
Statewide Specialist Services
Journey of Therapy Services

Therapy service provision for people with disabilities in rural and remote Western Australia (WA) has evolved over many years.
Journey of Therapy Services

• 1980’s Fly in / Fly out
• 1990 Department of Health
• 1993 Additional services
• 1993 Establishment of Country Services
• 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
Memorandum of Understanding

• In 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established between WA Country Health Services (WACHS) and Disability Services Commission (DSC)

• This MOU outlines the partnership arrangement between WACHS & DSC regarding Therapy Services for People with Disabilities, and the roles and responsibilities of each organisation
Why a Partnership?

• To improve therapy service provision for people with disabilities

• Established due to the acknowledgement of a shared responsibility for the provision of these services

i.e. a common goal!
Count Me In
Disability Future Directions

- Personalised Supports and Services
- Participation and Contribution in all aspects of life
- Economic and Community Foundations
Principles

The partnership is based on a number of principles including:

• A collaborative approach that promotes more effective outcomes for all community members, including in people with disabilities

• A commitment to providing quality therapy services that are:
  ✓ as close as possible to where people live and work, and in a way that addresses geographical, cultural and other barriers
  ✓ accessible to all people in the community, including people with disabilities, on the basis of relative need
Aim of the Partnership

• To enhance access and quality of therapy services for people with disabilities in country WA via:

   ✓ Coordinated models of therapy service that are responsive to local community needs and resources

   ✓ Increased knowledge and skills for WACHS therapists in disability related matters

   ✓ Increased professional development, professional collaboration and support for country based therapists
Regions Covered

- Kimberley
- Pilbara
- Midwest
- Wheatbelt
- Goldfields
- Great Southern

N.B. The South West region of WA has other arrangements in place for therapy service provision
In Practice - WACHS

• WACHS therapists provide direct therapy services for people within their local communities, including people with disabilities
Challenges

• Minimal experience as a therapist

• Limited experience with specific client group or type of condition

• Reduced access to locally available training, resources and support networks\(^1\)
Challenges

• Geographical location of clients and large caseloads\textsuperscript{1,2}

• Difficulty developing specialised skills in specific clinical areas due to diversity of caseloads
In Practice - The CRC Team

- The Commission’s Country Resource and Consultancy Team (CRC Team) consists of experienced senior Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists

- The CRC Team provides disability related consultancy, training and professional development for WACHS therapists, upon request
The Team

The Country Resource & Consultancy Team (CRCT) consists of:

- Team Leader (1 FTE):
- Resource Occupational Therapists (1.5 FTE):
- Resource Physiotherapists (1.5 FTE):
- Resource Speech Pathologists (2.0 FTE):
- Administrative Assistant (1 FTE):
- Technician services (contracted)
Areas of Consultancy, Training and Professional Development

- Assistance is predominantly requested in the areas of:
  - Specialised equipment
  - Paediatric assessment and intervention
  - Specific clinical areas
  - Person / family centred therapy programming
Methods of Support

• Telephone
• Email
• Videoconferencing
• Provision of resources
• On-site visits
On-site Support

• WACHS therapists must submit a request
• 4 opportunities a year to do so
• Between 10 and 13 requests are submitted each quarter
• CRC Team attempts to visit all regions requesting on-site support
• On some occasions, the CRC Team is unable to action all requests for on-site support in a particular quarter
Challenges

- Number of requests exceeds limit of team
- On site visits only quarterly upon request
- Access to our team when out of the office e.g. on regional trips
- Limited resources to provide on-site training and training resources
- Staff vacancies on CRC Team
- Diversity of queries asked
- Frequent travel
Possible solution

• Development of Wheelchair maintenance DVD

Aims:
• Production of a DVD on the basic maintenance and repair of equipment such as wheeled mobility devices and postural seating components.
• The DVD will be utilised by people living in remote locations as an instructional guide in order to maintain and repair equipment which is vital to enable the person with a disability to be able to carry our normal daily living, until a technician or appropriate tradesperson is available to assist.
• Many regions that are visited by CRC team have little or no access to qualified trades people and equipment can quite quickly deteriorate to a level where is unstable, dangerous or unable to be used.
Considerations

• Don’t forget to check with your local therapist before commencing the repair to ensure they are ok with you completing it.
• Do not attempt the repair if you do not feel confident to complete the task.
• If you tighten the armrests and footplates and they still don’t stay in place, talk to your therapist. The chair may need new parts.
• It is really important to contact your local therapist if you worried about the position of the postural supports or if they are worn or damaged.
• Check the frame for any cracks, bends, splits or large dents. If you find any of these do not use the chair – contact the Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist at your local hospital and they can arrange repairs.
Conclusion

• The partnership arrangement has resulted in enhanced access and improved quality of therapy services for people with disabilities in rural and remote WA.
Conclusion

• The partnership is successful due to:
  
  ✔ regular liaison and exchange if information between the Commission and WACHS
  ✔ the shared commitment to improving services for people with disabilities
Considerations for the Future

• Ongoing collaboration between the Commission and WACHS to ensure new and revised health and disability sector policies continue to support improvements to service provision for all people, including people with disabilities.

• Other agencies and regional planning authorities are encouraged to consider partnership arrangements to improve services for people living in rural and remote areas, and increase support and training for staff working in these areas.
References


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