

Improving access to assistive technology in the Pacific



Summary Pacific AT Procurement study



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Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has been signed by many Pacific countries. The CRPD says that all persons with disabilities have the same human rights as everyone else. These include the right to health care, education and equal opportunity to access rehabilitation and Assistive Technology (AT).

AT describes any piece of equipment that helps a person carry out tasks they might not otherwise be able to do. Common examples of AT are wheelchairs, reading glasses, crutches and hearing aids. The World Health Organization divides AT into six categories: cognition, communication, hearing, mobility, self-care and vision.

The AT Procurement Study was conducted to understand the challenges that people in Pacific Island Countries currently face when trying to access AT. Based on what was learned, the report recommends how access to AT in the region could be improved.

122 people (53% female and 47% male) in 13 countries were consulted. Interviews took place in Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu in 2019.

Conclusions

- The availability, choice, affordability and quality of AT is very limited
- More information about AT needs to be available and easier to access
- Public awareness about AT needs to improve
- Users of AT need to be more included in decision making about AT
- User choice is important
- To be affordable for everyone, AT products will likely need to be subsidised
- It is important to set standards to maintain quality of products and services
- Effective regional collaboration could address some of the current challenges for users of AT
- There are advantages to applying principles of commercial procurement and logistics to the supply of AT products on a regional scale
- Access to services in countries needs to be improved in parallel to regional procurement
- Planning for health services means planning for rehabilitation and AT too

Recommendations

The three recommendations of the study are listed below, and shown in Fig 2 on the next page.

The three recommendations link closely to each other. To improve access to AT in the region, we need to invest in all three recommendations:

1. Establish a Pacific AT resource facility

to provide impartial information, guidance on AT products, services, training and policy for the region.

2. Establish an AT supply hub

to supply a range of priority AT products, of an appropriate standard, for the lowest cost, shortening delivery times and making smaller and mixed orders available.

3. Strengthen national AT services and workforce

Including within health systems, so that access to AT products and services improves for AT users in Pacific countries.

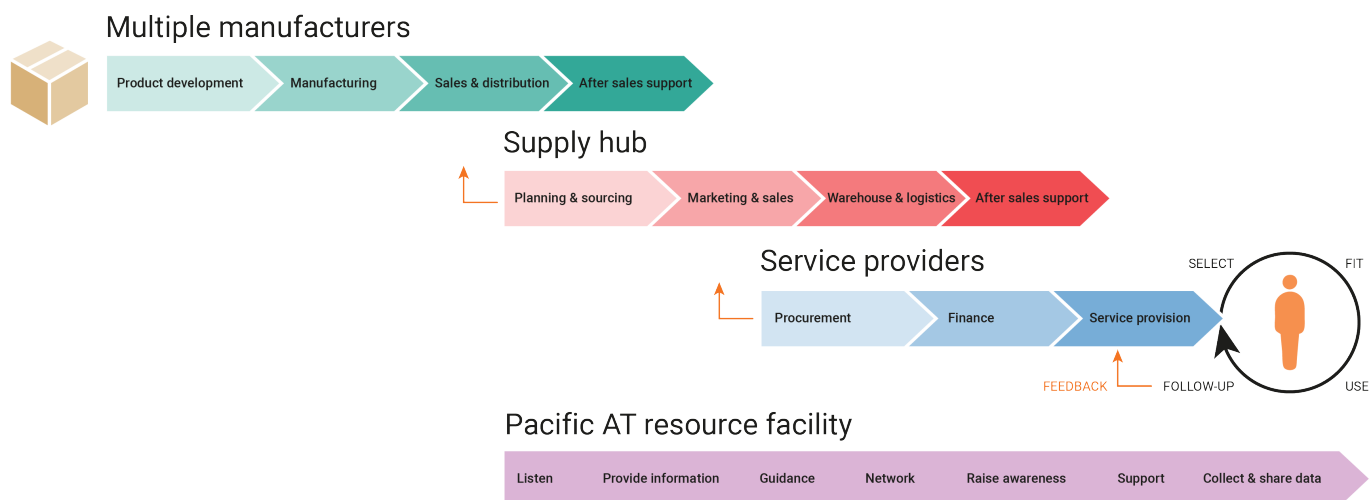


Fig 1: The AT value chain proposed in the study shows the role each stakeholder has in helping users to access AT

Next steps

Failure to prioritise AT now will create more problems and higher health care costs in future years. The AT procurement study is intended as a blueprint to guide all stakeholders toward clear and specific actions that can significantly improve access to AT services and products.

Key regional and global stakeholders are being invited to a technical meeting to discuss a roadmap for the establishment of the Pacific AT resource facility.

Donors are being sought to fund the establishment of the Pacific AT resource facility, the intended first step in the realisation of the study's recommendations.

The added value for donors of investing in the three study recommendations are:

- Improving lives in a way that can be shared in the 'Global Report on effective access to Assistive Technology' expected in 2021/22.
- Creating an innovative model of regional AT procurement that could be replicated in other regions.
- Opportunities to strengthen disability inclusion as part of the response to COVID-19 and humanitarian emergencies.

If you would like to participate in the upcoming technical meeting or invest in one of the three recommendations of the AT procurement study, please contact:

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The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

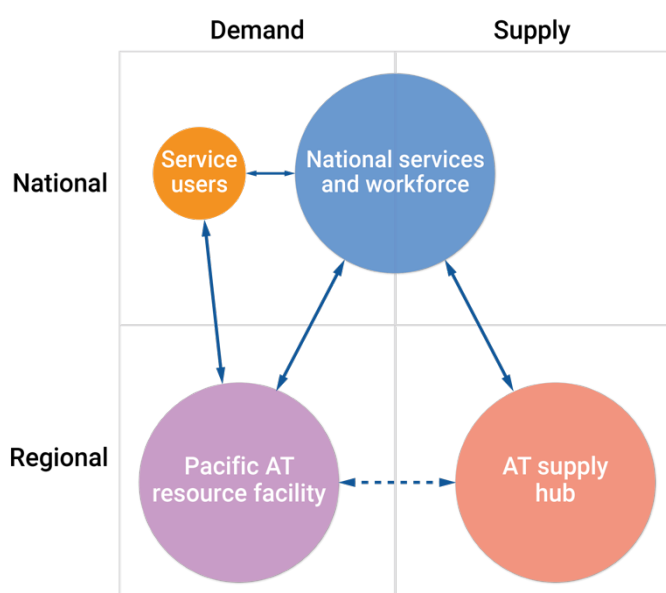


Fig 2: The three recommended areas of activity and their links