

## Update from OMAA: 24.8.22

Subject: OMAA Advocacy for the Orientation and Mobility Profession to be established as a dedicated support item in the *NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits* so that Specialists can register with the NDIS.

On Monday 7 August 2022, the Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia [OMAA] wrote to the Minister of NDIS, the Hon. Bill Shorten. In that letter, OMAA requested the **Minister's direct involvement to expedite OMAA's application to have the profession of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) included as a recognised and autonomous profession in the NDIS.** We look forward to a positive response.

*Why has OMAA taken this action?*

- In late June, a relatively small, but very significant, change was made to the *NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits 2022 – 23* [published on 22 June 2022]. The change involved converting the support item [15\_056\_0128\_1\_3], to a 'legacy support'. This support item was the only one available to be used by O&M Specialists, since the introduction of the NDIS, to provide O&M services to NDIS Participants who are blind or vision impaired.
- This decision and action to convert the support item to a 'legacy' item had the unintended, but immediate, effect of putting O&M service delivery to NDIS Participants, [as well as all Australians living with blindness and vision impairment], at high risk of no longer being sustainable and/or available in Australia.
- In response, the outcry and support from the blindness sector, both in person, on Facebook and other social media, was strong and swift. To its credit, the NDIA clarified and reinstated the support item within a few days.
- OMAA remains concerned that the root cause - ***Orientation and Mobility not being recognized as an autonomous profession by the NDIS/NDIA Commission*** - has not been addressed by the NDIS.

*What is the solution OMAA has advocated for: **To have Orientation and Mobility recognized as an autonomous profession by the NDIS/NDIA Commission.***

- It should be noted that since the introduction of NDIS nearly 10 years ago, NDIS has invested significantly in O&M for Participants living with blindness and vision impairment. However, this significant investment in O&M by NDIS and the associated improvements to the safety and quality of life outcomes for Participants has not received the recognition it deserves. The solution, from OMAA perspective, is for the Orientation and Mobility Profession to be established as a dedicated support item in the *NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits* so that Specialists can register with the NDIS.

- Prior to the 22 June 'event', O&M was categorised by the NDIS as 'other therapy'. Since the event, O&M services are now categorised by the NDIS as 'other professional'.
- OMAA believes strongly that assigning O&M to generic categories such as 'other therapy' and 'other professional' is not the best or most appropriate recognition of the specific functional challenges facing NDIS Participants living with blindness and vision impairment. Moreover, it leaves our essential services to people who are blind or vision impaired, and the workforce planning that is associated with that service delivery, vulnerable, especially regarding the regulation of the Orientation and Mobility Specialist Profession.
- OMAA has been engaging with, advocating, and waiting for over two years for the NDIS Commission and NDIA to decide on our application to have the O&M profession formally recognised. **OMAA invites NDIA and NDIS to come to the table to discuss and move the recognition and regulation of O&M Specialist services within its commission.**
- The feedback OMAA has had from the blindness sector and many people from the wider community in Australia is that people are genuinely surprised, shocked and concerned to learn that O&M is not officially recognised by NDIS as an essential disability-specific health/therapy support for NDIS Participants who are blind or vision impaired. They are confused, as we are, that O&M is not treated in the same way as 15 other professions: e.g., Art Therapy, Music Therapy, Developmental Education, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and so on.

#### *Where to now?*

In the letter to the Minister of NDIS, OMAA has made the case that NDIS' formal recognition of the profession of O&M will ensure that NDIS Participants living with blindness and vision impairment will continue to receive essential O&M services designed to enhance their personal safety, quality of life and participation in the community as well as the following:

- more choice and control - particularly for those participants who are Agency-managed,
- improved quality outcomes and accountability associated with O&M Specialists being able to register with the NDIS,
- transparency and formal recognition of the significant investment already made by NDIS in O&M services to participants who are blind or vision impaired, and
- safeguards for the sustainability of the O&M Specialist workforce and service delivery into the future.

**OMAA is looking forward to further communication and action with the Minister, the NDIS, and other stakeholders about expediting the delivery of the overdue recognition of O&M supports to NDIS Participants living with blindness and vision impairment.**

**OMAA is also communicating with other stakeholders and consumer groups in Australia to plan how we can work together to move this issue forward.**

*In conclusion:*

OMAA's goal is unambiguous, and ongoing:

***To have the O&M profession included as a recognised and autonomous profession in the NDIS. This requires the NDIA and the NDIS Commission to establish a dedicated support item for O&M services in the 'NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits' so that O&M Specialists can register with the NDIS. Registration with NDIS will also promote regulation of O&M Specialist Service provision in Australia.***

OMAA will continue to provide information and leadership on this important issue via regular updates on OMAA website at <https://www.omaaustralasia.com>.