



Position Document

Distribution of Long Canes

The Issue:

The Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) has received a number of reports that long canes are being distributed by organisations to people with low vision or blindness, who have not received a comprehensive Orientation and Mobility (O&M) assessment and/or instruction in correct long cane use by a qualified O&M Specialist.

The Problem:

The problems associated with sending out long canes to people who have not had an O&M assessment and training include the following:

- The wrong size and type of long canes have been sent out.
- The person receiving the long cane may not know how to use the cane safely and correctly.
- A person using the wrong type of cane and/or in an incorrect manner is at risk of increased risk of injury or death.
- Other people in the community can be at risk if the person is using the cane incorrectly.
- Bad habits associated with incorrect cane use can easily develop, which might compromise their longer-term safety and independence.
- The cane sent out to an untrained individual without an O&M assessment might not be suitable for the type of environment the person travels in because that has not been assessed.

OMAA Position:

When used correctly, a long cane is an effective tool that can equip and empower a person with low vision or blindness with increased safety and independence in a variety of environments. However, it is important to first assess the suitability and type of long cane, plus the person's environment, within the context of a comprehensive O&M assessment. In addition, a program of instruction in the correct use of a long cane, delivered by a qualified O&M Specialist, is essential to ensure that the client is using the long cane safely and effectively.

The OMAA acknowledges the importance of dignity of risk and understands that consumers have a choice, and this position enables consumers to make informed decisions when choosing suitable equipment. The OMAA believes that sending long canes to people with low vision or blindness, without a comprehensive O&M assessment for the long cane and subsequent instruction in the correct use of long cane techniques, poses a significant risk for organisations and individuals. Specifically, this relates to the legal risk associated with failing to address issues related to duty of care and professional negligence.