



Operations Local Area Coordination Upper South West

A Guide to Selecting Therapy and Specialist Services

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Therapy and specialist services can offer a range of benefits to people with disability, their families and carers.

They support health and wellbeing, improve functioning and maximise ability, help develop independence, build people's skills and enable increased participation in community life.

What services are available?

Therapy and specialist services may be included and funded in your individual plan. Your Local Area Coordinator can let you know what services are available and provide you with a list of Disability Services Commission (DSC) endorsed service providers.

There are a wide range of therapy and specialist services that people can access, including but not limited to:

- physiotherapy
- psychology
- occupational therapy
- social work
- speech pathology
- podiatry
- dietetics
- human relationship counselling
- assistive technology, aids and equipment prescription

Therapy and specialist service providers include private providers and non-government organisations.

Choosing a service provider

There are three suggested steps when choosing a service provider:

1. Initial research

Gather information and make enquiries about service providers in your area. This may include internet research, talking to other families and discussing options with your Local Area Coordinator. There are links to additional information included in this document.

2. Talk to potential service providers

If you are able to meet face-to-face, let the service provider know the purpose of the meeting, who will be attending, if interpreter services are required or if there any cultural considerations. Not all providers will have the time and resources to meet with all potential clients, so if a meeting is not possible you can speak over the phone. There is a suggested checklist included in this document with questions to consider.

3. Weigh up your options

The services that are best for you and your family depend on your particular needs. When deciding on a service provider or specific therapy or specialist support, there are a number of factors to consider such as:

- What are your options? Is this the only provider or are there other good choices?
- Does the service base its approach on sound evidence and best practice?
- How comfortable do you feel about any interactions you've had with the service or therapist?
- The personal and practical benefits. For example, your values, where you live and the personal and financial costs.

Who is responsible for quality assurance?

This depends on how the funded strategy in your Individual Plan is managed. There are two funding management options available to people in the Upper South West Local Area Coordination area:

- **Self-managed**
You or your representative (e.g. parent, spouse or guardian) may prefer to receive the funds and pay for services directly.
If you are self-managing your funding, you are responsible for the quality of the paid supports and services you select.
- **Organisation-managed**
You may prefer a service provider that has a contract with the Commission to receive the funds for therapy and provide the services to you. This can include shared management arrangements (Footnote 1).

Service providers who have a contract with the Commission must comply with the Disability Services Commission's Quality System (Footnote 2). Through the quality system, the Commission monitors and evaluates service quality and service providers are expected to continuously improve the services they provide. Service providers must also meet outcomes that have been agreed between you and the provider.

Your Local Area Coordinator can discuss these options with you.

Other considerations when choosing a service provider

If you are partly or fully managing your funding for therapy and want to choose a therapist or service provider not contracted with the Commission, it may be difficult to negotiate your way through all the information, particularly for people who are newly accessing therapy services.

While it is expected that services should be innovative and demonstrate best practice in therapy provision, in general you should be wary of:

- claims that any particular intervention will provide “cure” or “fix”
- costs which seem excessive
- use of scientific jargon (this does not necessarily mean a service is using a scientifically proven approach)

If you have any doubts or concerns discuss these with your Local Area Coordinator.

What other resources are available?

In addition to your Local Area Coordinator and the Disability Services Commission website, you might like to consider accessing information from professional and peak bodies including:

[Australian Health Practitioner Registration Agency](http://www.ahpra.gov.au/) (www.ahpra.gov.au/)

[Speech Pathology Australia](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) (www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)

[Australian Association of Social Workers](http://www.aasw.asn.au) (www.aasw.asn.au)

[Dieticians Association of Australia](http://www.daa.asn.au) (www.daa.asn.au)

[Carers WA](http://www.carerswa.asn.au) (www.carerswa.asn.au)

[National Disability Services \(WA\)](http://www.nds.org.au) (www.nds.org.au)

[Raising Children Network](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au) (www.raisingchildren.net.au)

[Early Childhood Intervention Australia](http://www.ecia.org.au) (www.ecia.org.au)

Further information

- Visit the [Disability Services Commission website](http://www.disability.wa.gov.au) (www.disability.wa.gov.au)
- Contact your Local Area Coordinator
- Email USWAutismEI@dsc.wa.gov.au
- Call Area Manager LAC Upper South West: (08) 9722 3000
- TTY: 9426 9315

Checklist

Skills and experience

It is important to ask questions about the qualifications, knowledge and skills of staff.

You should look for evidence to show that the supports and services work. This will include the service provider demonstrating:

- an understanding of worldwide trends and research
- an understanding or thinking about the unintended consequences of implementing a particular therapy technique
- that services and supports are located within established organisational structures, such as having a management structure and policies and processes that support the delivery of the services.

Some questions it may be helpful to ask of the service provider:

1. What professions do you employ/work with and what are their qualifications?
2. Do your staff have professional accreditation and/or appropriate training?

Speech Pathologists: Eligible for “Practising Membership” with Speech Pathology Australia.

Occupational Therapists: Eligible for “General Registration” on the register of Occupational Therapists with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority

Physiotherapists: Eligible for “General Registration” on the register of Physiotherapists with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority

Psychologists: Eligible for “General Registration” on the register of Psychologists with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority

Social Workers: Eligible for “Ordinary Membership” with Australian Association of Social Workers

Dieticians: Eligible for membership of the Dieticians Association of Australia as an Accredited Practising Dietician

3. What training and experience does your staff have in relation to working with people with disability and in particular, working towards my chosen outcome?
4. What results have you achieved with other people who have similar goals?
5. How do your staff keep up-to-date to ensure supports and services offered are evidenced based and effective?
6. Do you have experience in working with people from my cultural background?
7. Does your staff have current National Police and Working with Children Checks?

How the service will be provided

It is important to ask questions about how the provider will link in other professionals and specialist services.

The Commission supports an interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary team approach, where appropriate, to provide the range of expertise needed to meet individual, family and community goals. Broadly, this refers to a team of professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech therapists, working together to provide services to meet the specific needs of the person and family and to adjust the balance of these services as the person's needs change.

Services should be provided in a range of natural settings wherever possible, such as in the home and local community, day care, preschools, schools, work and other locations.

Some questions it may be helpful to ask of the service provider:

1. How do you work with other professionals as a team and how do you work with other professionals involved in my plan? Will you coordinate my care with other treatment providers, and if so, how?
2. How will I communicate with my therapists? Is there one main contact or do I talk directly with each team member as needed?
3. Where are you located and in what settings do you provide therapy services?
4. What technologies do you use as part of your supports and strategies? Do you use video sessions, iPad/Android apps, Skype, email?
5. What times are available for initial and regular appointments? Does the service offer Monday to Friday – 9am-5pm or is their flexibility for before and after school or work? Are services offered on the weekend?
6. How soon can services commence?

Individualised services

The Commission supports a self-directed approach. This means you will have genuine choice and control over your supports and services, including access to personalised support arrangements which maximise independence.

Individual Planning is about achieving outcomes, not working within defined programmes and guidelines. Services should:

- have you at the centre of your therapy plan
- not take a one size fits all approach
- assist people to be part of their local community
- promote and support you to develop and maintain connections, networks and relationships
- provide you with opportunities for life-long learning and development

Some questions it may be helpful to ask of the service provider:

1. Are your services person and family centred? Can you describe how? Can you describe how you would work with me, my family and others involved in my care?
2. How will you facilitate inclusion and participation in my local community? Can the service give support and guidance to other organisations that I am involved with? (e.g. sporting clubs, community groups).
3. How much flexibility is there in your services? Do I have a choice of what services to take on? What happens if my needs change?
4. How often and for how long would you anticipate seeing me?
5. How will you evaluate and measure progress and report this to me?
6. How long do you expect it to take to achieve the outcome desired?
7. How can I contact you between sessions if I have questions?

Funding arrangements

Some questions it may be helpful to ask of the service provider:

1. What are the costs and payment arrangements?
2. What exactly is provided for that amount?
3. What are your charges for travel?
4. What if I need to cancel or I do not attend a scheduled appointment?
5. Are there any other costs associated with this service which are not covered by my plan?

Other questions to consider

The goal is to choose a therapist you feel comfortable with so you can all work together to ensure the therapy is successful.

You may need to ask more questions that will reassure you such as:

1. Do you provide other types of services that may be useful?
2. Are interpreter services available?
3. Does your organisation provide avenues for me to meet other people and families in similar circumstances?
4. How do we resolve any issues or disputes?

Footnotes

1. Self-management of funds requires the approval of the Local Area Coordinator (see Operational Policy – Plan Management Decisions)
2. Disability Services Commission Quality System Policy , 14 March 2014