

Practice Alert

Safe Use of Hoists

April 2023

Key points

- Some people with disability use hoists or have support from workers so they can complete transfers safely.
- A hoist can be used to increase a participant's independence, dignity, quality of life and reduce the risk of injury to the person during transfers from one location to another.
- Hoists also reduce the risk of workplace injury for support staff who assist people with transfers.
- Individualised assessment is required to select suitable equipment for a person and their environment, and should only be used when prescribed by an appropriately qualified health professional.
- People with disability and workers can be at risk when the assistance they are provided is not supported in line with their mobility and manual handling plan, or when equipment isn't maintained.
- Training in a person's support plan and the correct use of a hoist is essential to keep people with disability and support staff safe.
- Providers should undertake risk assessment and management to minimise risks associated with manual handling and consider work, health and safety requirements.

Why hoists are important

The use of a hoist to transfer safely from one location to another can be integral to the quality of life. Equipment and methods for transfers can be assessed and prescribed by appropriately qualified health professionals such as occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

Injuries that occur when transferring people are a major occupational health and safety issue for workers. Providers and workers should be aware of their role to report and manage risks associated with manual handling tasks in relation to the relevant state and territory Work Health and Safety legislation and their obligations under the [NDIS \(Code of Conduct\) Rules 2018](#) (NDIS Code of Conduct), to provide supports and services in a safe and competent manner with care and skill.

When used correctly and appropriately fitted, transfer equipment, such as ceiling and mobile hoists, reduce the risk of injury for the person being transferred. They can also significantly decrease injuries and physical stress for support workers by 58%. Despite these benefits, the unsafe use of hoists and unsafe manual handling practices can and have had serious consequences for both workers and participants.

Supporting participants

Providers should support participants in the following ways:

Understand participant support needs

- If a participant uses a hoist (or other equipment or methods for transfers), they should have an individualised mobility and manual handling plan which details safe manual handling practices for the equipment they have been prescribed.
- A person who requires manual handling and assistance with transfers should have the choice to be involved in the assessment and management of risk, and with the training of staff and development of support plans.
- People with disability should be assessed by an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or other appropriately qualified health professional before any equipment is used.
- Mobility and manual handling plans should be reviewed regularly, at least every 12 months or as advised by a health professional, or as soon as the needs of the person change. This ensures the equipment and transfer methods remain appropriate and safe.

Mobility and manual handling plans

Providers supporting a participant at an assessment:

- Consider how the participant will participate in the assessment, development, implementation and review of their mobility and manual handling plan. Ensure that any information is provided to the participant in an accessible format.
- Support the participant's preferred method of communication and consider the times of day the participant may be best suited to participate in the assessment.
- Ensure the participant has an adequate environment for the assessment that allows for privacy and a clear space with space to manoeuvre around.
- Where required, the worker present at the assessment may need to provide additional input in to a participant's mobility and support needs. The worker should be someone who is familiar with the participant, their personal preferences, communication style and skills. This worker should also be familiar with the participant's other relevant support plans as directed by the appropriately qualified health professional.
- When developing the mobility and manual handling plan, providers and workers should collaborate with the appropriately qualified health professional on how best to communicate the plan effectively to workers, for example, by using pictures of transfers, diagrams of equipment or checklists for each step of the process. This should also be shared with the participant.

Points to include in a mobility and manual handling:

Plans should always be developed with an appropriately qualified health professional and in conjunction with your organisation's risk and incident management systems. This list is not designed to be prescriptive or exhaustive.

- Procedures for transfers: for instance the positioning of the person and worker/s.
- Communication needs: where required, how the person expresses discomfort or distress, and any positive behaviour support strategies required to safely assist with the transfer.
- Roles and responsibilities: the number of people required to safely undertake a transfer, and what their role is in the transfer process.
- Maintenance: how equipment maintenance is undertaken, by who and who to contact if there are any issues with equipment.
- Risk factors: any risk management strategies associated with transfers, falls and mobility equipment. This includes a description of near misses or previous incidents specific to that participant.
- Review cycle: timeframes or circumstances to indicate a review by a health professional for example changes to the participant's health, support and behaviour.

Worker training

Providers should ensure workers are:

- Trained on how to implement a participant's mobility and manual handling plan.
- Trained in the environment they will work in, with the participant present.
- Trained to use a hoist, using the same model of equipment they will operate in their workplace.
- Receiving regular refresher training based on recommendations from an appropriately qualified health professional and should take in to account any natural staff turnover.
- Receiving regular supervision to ensure consistency.
- Training schedules and attendance should be recorded.
- Familiar with when to act and report on issues associated with equipment, so as to prevent serious injury to participants and workers.

Risk management & Work, Health and Safety

- Providers should ensure workers undertake training around work, health and safety requirements for safe manual handling as per the NDIS Commission Code of Conduct and applicable state or territory legislation.
- Providers should undertake regular risk assessments in relation to safe manual handling, considering both the risk to the participant and worker. Reviews of risk assessments should involve the participant.
- Providers should ensure workers are familiar with the relevant organisational procedures relating to risk assessment, the organisations incident management system and when to notify a reportable and non-reportable incident in order to manage and respond to and prevent issues.

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- Providers should maintain a schedule to ensure equipment is in good working order. Consider taking photos of equipment to monitor wear over time and ensure each participant's equipment is labelled, including equipment servicing dates.

Equipment maintenance

It's important that equipment is well-maintained and regularly checked for signs of wear and tear. Advice on maintenance schedules should be available in the product guide, or can be requested from the prescribing health professional or equipment supplier. Recall notifications can also be tracked in this manner.

Under Australian Consumer Law, people with disability also have consumer rights around the purchase, lease or hire of equipment. These rights extend beyond the period of the manufacturer's warranty (NDIA 2021). Participants should be supported to exercise their consumer rights to ensure they have access to functional, safe equipment without unnecessary additional cost. Refer to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) for further educational materials on the [rights and protections for consumers with disability](#), and where to go for advice or to make a complaint.

Referral pathways

Participants, their carers and providers should access supports to ensure safe use of hoists.

- **NDIS funding:** Depending on the participant's circumstances, NDIS participants may have funding for occupational therapy or physiotherapy. Providers should work with participants, their families and carers or support coordinators to ensure adequate funding is available for regular assessment and review, worker ratios, training, equipment set up and maintenance.
- **General Practitioner:** Some people with certain conditions can get sessions Medicare-funded sessions with allied health professionals through a Chronic Disease Management Plan.
- **Discharging from hospital:** If someone has been in hospital, they may be discharged with equipment. Providers should be sure to work with the hospital discharge team to ensure training, equipment and any reviews required are organised.

NDIS Workforce Capability Framework

Providers should consider how to increase NDIS workers' training and skills in line with the [NDIS Workforce Capability Framework](#).

Resources

- A safe work instruction from the South Australian government for [using a ceiling hoist to lift a person from a bed to a chair](#). This resource gives examples of potential hazards, a dynamic risk assessment and illustrations of safe use of a ceiling hoist.
- A safe work instruction from the South Australian government [for using a portable hoist to lift a person from the floor](#).
- [Manual Handling for Disability Support Workers](#): an online module by National Disability Services for workers undertaking manual handling tasks.

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- A safe work instruction from WorkSafe Victoria about [transferring people for toileting and bathing](#).
 - 'Transferring People Safely is a comprehensive guide from WorkSafe Victoria about [manual handling, risk assessment and preventing falls](#).
 - Disability Services Occupational health and safety compliance kit: [how to control the most common hazardous tasks in the disability services sector](#). This resource from WorkSafe Victoria includes guidance and tools for risk assessment and management in moving and supporting people with a disability, supporting people with personal hygiene care and assisting people with, or moving wheelchairs.
 - Hazardous Manual Tasks: a guide from Safe Work Australia about [work health and safety risk assessment and management](#).
 - [Manual Handling and Risk Management Guidelines](#) from the Department of Disability, Aging and Home Care: A resource for manual handling risk management in the disability sector.
 - [Your consumer rights are](#) resources help participants to understand their consumer rights in relation to assistive technology.

State and Territory Work, Health and Safety Information:

- [NT WorkSafe](#)
- [SafeWork NSW](#)
- [SafeWork SA](#)
- [WorkSafe QLD](#)
- [WorkSafe Tasmania](#)
- [WorkSafe Victoria](#)
- [WorkSafe WA](#)

Provider Obligations

NDIS Code of Conduct

Providers and workers must comply with the NDIS Code of Conduct when providing supports or services to NDIS participants.

The NDIS Code of Conduct requires all NDIS providers and workers who provide NDIS supports or services to NDIS participants to, among other things:

- Provide supports and services in a safe and competent manner with care and skill
- Promptly take steps to raise and act on concerns about matters that may impact the quality and safety of supports and services provided to people with disability.

NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators

If you are a registered NDIS provider, you must comply with the [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Provider Registration and Practice Standards\) Rules 2018](#) as part of your conditions of registration. The NDIS Practice Standards relate to the delivery of safe, quality supports and services, and the management of risks with the supports you provide to NDIS participants.

In delivering NDIS support and services, providers must also demonstrate compliance with the [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Quality Indicators\) Guidelines 2018](#). The NDIS Commission's guidance on the [NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators](#) provides a further resource to assist registered NDIS providers to understand their obligations.

The NDIS Practice Standards that are most relevant to this alert include:

- **Risk Management:** Risks to participants, workers and the provider are identified and managed.
- **Incident Management:** Each participant is safeguarded by the provider's incident management system, ensuring that incidents are acknowledged, respond to, well-managed and learned from.
- **Human Resource Management:** Each participant's support needs are met by workers who are competent in relation to their role, hold relevant qualifications, and who have relevant expertise and experience to provide person-centred support.
- **Continuity of Supports:** Each participant has access to timely and appropriate support without interruption.
- **Access to Supports:** Each participant associated accesses the most appropriate supports that meet their needs, goals and preferences.
- **Support Planning:** Each participant is actively involved in the development of their support plans. Support plans reflect participant needs, requirements, preferences, strengths and goals, and are regularly reviewed.
- **Responsive Support Provision:** Each participant accesses responsive, timely, competent and appropriate supports to meet their needs, desired outcomes and goals.
- **Transitions to or from a Provider:** Each participant experiences a planned and coordinated transition to or from the provider.
- **Safe Environment:** Each participant accesses supports in a safe environment that is appropriate to their needs

Incident Management and Reportable Incidents

The requirement to report certain serious incidents to the NDIS Commission is a condition of registration for registered NDIS providers. The *National Disability Insurance Scheme (Incident Management and Reportable Incidents) Rules 2018* set out the obligations on registered NDIS providers to establish incident management arrangements to enable the identification of systemic issues and drive improvements in the quality of the supports they deliver, and also notify, investigate and respond to reportable incidents and allegations.

For an incident to be a reportable incident, it is to have occurred (or is alleged to have occurred) in connection with the provision of supports or services to a person with disability by the registered NDIS provider.

Complaints management

The *National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018* require registered NDIS providers to have an effective system for management and resolution of complaints about the supports or services they provide.

It is also an expectation that providers support people with disability to understand how to make a complaint directly to the provider or to the NDIS Commission.

When a provider receives a direct complaint, the person making the complaint and the person with disability affected by the issue must:

- Be informed of the complaint's progress
- Be appropriately involved in the resolution of the complaint and
- Be updated on the implementation of any relevant outcomes, including any action taken and decisions made.

The NDIS Commission also expects that unregistered providers will effectively manage any complaints they receive.

Acknowledgement

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