

Things to consider when purchasing services and supports

These tips are provided as helpful practical issues and questions to use where they are relevant to your situation, in your selections of service providers and/or other supports

In this era of managing your own supports (such as self-directed approaches) it is important for people with a disability and their families/supporters who are embarking on this journey to have good information to support them.

This document provides individuals **with ideas to consider** in their decision-making about which service/agency to purchase support from. This information may also assist individuals to avoid potential difficulties.

To find information about the service you are considering, you can find this in their brochures, annual reports or website. This means you can **research** a service you're interested in first. Then you can ask them specific questions about how you want to do things **in the context** of the type of activity or staff support that you are after.

Financial Considerations

Of course, this is a key area especially when purchasing services and/or staff hours from a service provider, which means there are also many pitfalls.

- How does the cost per hour (if purchasing staff per hour) or per day or per program (where applicable) compare to the NDIS Price list i.e. equal to or less or more?
- How often are invoices sent monthly or fortnightly, and how much time do you have in which to pay them?
- What other costs will the service charge you? Note: NDIS Registered Providers cannot charge you more than the NDIS Price Guide unit cost for that type of support, but unregistered providers can set their own prices. [NDIS Price Guide Victoria](#)
- What is the minimum time for a shift booking e.g. 1 hour or 30 minutes?
- Can you employ staff casually according to your roster (i.e. not permanent part-time or full-time)?
- How much notice must be given for cancelling a specific booking/shift to avoid still having to pay for the shift? e.g. 2 business days
- Do you have to sign a Service Agreement, and can you vary it to suit your needs?
- Will the service take bookings for shifts if a Service Agreement runs out e.g. NDIS is late in approving a Plan and therefore a new plan isn't available for a short time?
- How much notice do you have to give to break the Service Agreement and move to another service? e.g. one month

Staffing Considerations

When thinking about buying staff with your **package**, you will need to consider things like how much involvement you want in the selection, orientation and monitoring of staff.

Select and/or manage your own staff:

- Can you select your own staff and then have the service sign them up as employees?
- Will they assist you to develop a pool of staff that are familiar with you or your family member and then only roster these staff for providing your support?
- Can you provide supervision and support to your pool of staff?
- If your pool of staff is only providing support to you and you are supervising them, can they be exempt from:
 - ordinary staff in-services, comprehensive supervision if not required?
 - the full 'orientation' process, e.g. shouldn't need some non-safety training
- What are the key policies that you will need to be mindful of when supervising staff who are technically employed by the service? These include provision of a safe working environment, lifting safely policy and medication administration.

Not select your own staff:

- Can you have an agreed trial period for staff?
- Will the service agree to send only familiar staff from a small pool (number will depend on the number of hours required etc.) of their staff?
- Can you have shadow shifts for new staff to learn from regular staff?
- Do they have staff who are willing to do the things you need?
 - work after hours, evenings or weekends?
 - go on public transport? For example, would they have staff that would take the person to the football on public transport in the evening?
 - support the person to participate in the activities you need, for example swimming or golf?

General questions you can ask a service if relevant to your situation:

- Can you provide your own orientation to staff in addition to orientation from a service?
- Where there are personal care tasks required of staff, especially involving physical support, ask if there are special OH&S requirements for your bathroom or the use of hoists etc.
- What basic level of training are the service's staff required to have?
- How long has the service been providing support to people with disabilities and do they have disability experienced staff to provide you?
- Will the service be willing to provide additional training to staff to meet your needs?
- Can volunteers be involved and accompany paid staff on activities?
- Can you provide reimbursements from your funds to volunteers for their expenses?

Policy Considerations

Individuals and families need to think about what they may want staff to do as part of their support role with them. This is because sometimes a service you wish to purchase 'staff hours' from, may have policies that either support or are a barrier to the program you want for yourself/your family member. The key question to ask is:

- Can they provide services outside their policies? e.g. if they are the employer of the staff involved in your program and their policies say that staff cannot transport participants in their own car, can this be negotiated?

You can ask for a copy of a service's policies around the following areas depending on the role or activity you have in mind.

Transport

- Are staff able to transport participants, if so in their own car or agencies?
- Are staff allowed to have other passengers, such as family members?
- If it is a service-based activity you are purchasing, is transport provided to and from the service and if so, at what cost?
- If it is a full day activity, is other transport required during the day (e.g. to go from one activity to another) going to be an extra charge?

Staff and employment

- Does the service have a staff recruitment policy?
- How are new staff provided with general orientation about the service?
- How are new staff provided with the opportunity to orientate themselves about the 'clients' they support? e.g. client profile summary and shadow shifts
- Does the service have a minimum staff qualification policy that may prohibit local people with the specific skills that you want to provide a program for you?
- Can you book staff shifts directly with your pool staff?
- What basic training do staff have?
- What cultural awareness training have staff had?
- If you have specific needs like behaviour support or lifting, ask if they have staff with this training. If not, will they train staff for you?

Occupational Health and Safety

- How strict is it prohibitive or flexible? With additional training would things be different?
- Does it restrict any of the activities you might want provided, such as administering medication, showering person in your shower or transport?

Fees Policy

- Does the service have a fees policy?
- Are there additional charges, such as for administration, activities (e.g. entrance fee to swimming) or for the use of vehicles/transport?
- How often and when are there increases in charges and/or fees?
- How are participants and their families consulted about fee changes?

Complaints Policy

- Does the service have a Complaints Policy that is easy to obtain?
- If you have problems or issues who should you talk to?
- Can you give constructive feedback in confidence to the nominated person?
- How are families involved in quality assurance processes?
- Are there appropriate versions of this policy available for your use such as in other languages or in plain English pictorial?

Communication Considerations

Communication is key to working with a service, so it is worth finding out a bit about what you can expect from the service.

- What regular communication can you expect to receive?
- Who will be your contact for ordinary bookings?
- Will you/your family member have a Key Worker?
- If you have problems or issues who should you talk to?

Quality

- Is the service a Registered Disability Service Provider under State law (Disability Act 2006 VIC) or a Registered Service Provider under the NDIS Act 2013?
- What quality assurance process they use and what Standards are they accredited against, e.g. ISO, DHHS, NDIS, Health? Is their accreditation up to date?
- What type of involvement do participants and families have in quality assurance? Will you receive an annual survey, or do they hold feedback Forums?

Finding Services

You can purchase supports with your NDIS package from NDIS Registered providers. NDIS also has a list of [NDIS Registered Service Providers](#).

You can also purchase supports with your NDIS package from unregistered providers if you have the correct funds management option (i.e. Plan Management or Self-Management) in your NDIS Plan. If you can't find what you are looking for, then go back and ask your planner or Local Area Coordinator (LAC) to assist you.

Reminder: If you have tried a service and it isn't working out for you, then you can change to another service if it provides the same type (category) of support, such as changing your Support Coordination provider to another Support Coordination service.

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