



# Integrating Assistive Products into Humanitarian and Emergency Relief Supplies in the Pacific

People with disability are among the most at-risk people in humanitarian emergencies. The Pacific Disability Forum names assistive technology as a precondition for disability inclusion<sup>1</sup>, including in emergencies. Assistive technology refers to both assistive products (AP) which support functioning, independence, dignity and wellbeing, and the services and systems required for their provision.

**In 2023, DFAT commissioned a pilot to integrate AP into core relief items (CRI).** The pilot was integrated within DFAT's Humanitarian Logistics Capability (HLC) investment which facilitates the timely and effective delivery of Australian Government humanitarian assistance through the provision of humanitarian supply chain logistics support. HLC was managed by Palladium, with CBM Australia and the Nossal Institute providing technical advice.

Outcomes of this pilot include:

- Developed and piloted a **framework to describe the local situation for AP in emergencies**
- Increased **consensus and awareness of AP in disability inclusive humanitarian response** in the Pacific region
- Determined a **regionally relevant list of priority AP** suitable for emergency situations in the Pacific
- Identified potential **key stakeholders and pathways for integration of AP** within CRI in a range of Pacific contexts
- Developed **product cards**, providing information and guidance to support CRI
- Influenced **provision of AP within CRI in two Humanitarian responses**<sup>2</sup>
- Developed **provisional guidance for AP integration in three countries**<sup>3</sup>

The process of developing the guidance offers **globally relevant insights** for integrating AP into humanitarian responses. Co-designing local guidance to embed AP in needs-assessment, distribution, provision, and follow-up, helped raise awareness and build local consensus.

# Key Messages

## 1. Assistive products are difficult to access

### **Stakeholders reaffirmed the urgent need to improve access to AP in peacetime.**

People with disability and their representative organisations affirm the importance of AP. However, even basic products are often out of reach. Stakeholders from government, civil society, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and others report persistent challenges accessing AP and related services. There are many current efforts to increase access to AP and related services, however they will take time to take effect.

## 2. AP are essential in emergencies

### **Integrating AP within core relief items is both urgent and welcome.**

Stakeholders, including mainstream humanitarian actors, recognise the critical role of AP in emergencies, where they support protection, enable participation and help uphold the rights of people with disability.

## 3. AP access in humanitarian action is a growing global concern

**Access to AP has gained worldwide recognition as an essential part of humanitarian action.** AP is reflected in current guidance for disability-inclusive responses endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee<sup>4</sup>. The pilot in the Pacific was a unique approach to develop and test the inclusion of AP in humanitarian action.

## 4. International norms and guidelines need adaptation

### **Existing global health and humanitarian guidance is insufficient to guide a rights-based approach to AP integration within core relief items.**

International health responses often include AP, however these typically focus on newly injured individuals, rather than people with disability. Relying solely on health pathways for AP distribution risks reinforcing existing barriers and discrimination faced by people with disability. In addition, a localised emergency may not always meet the threshold for a formal health response, however people with disability will be among those affected and require AP to uphold their rights.

Likewise, local adaption of global AP guidance is essential. For example, WHO lists such as AT6 and AT10<sup>5</sup> should inform product options and quantity, but local actor input is required to refine product selection for the Pacific's unique context. These global tools should guide, not dictate, AP provision across diverse humanitarian settings.

## 5. AP requires specific, locally adapted delivery pathways

**Delivering AP to those who need them most, requires specific considerations and may follow different distribution pathways than other core relief supplies.**

CRIs are provided to partner governments based on their request. These governments manage distribution through local coordination mechanisms and may oversee international responses. As AP are relatively new in this context, and require different stakeholders and expertise, the existing distribution processes for CRIs are often not suitable. This pilot identified potential people, pathways, and processes from consignment to distribution and local provision, to ensure AP reach the right recipients. Across four Pacific countries, different 'best pathways' emerged, reflecting the need for locally adaption.

Local OPDs and disability service providers are well positioned to highlight contextual needs and help shape appropriate distribution pathways. To ensure AP are provided effectively to people with disability, product information must accompany the products at every stage of distribution.

## 6. It is feasible to integrate AP into Core relief items

**It is viable for local actors to consign AP supplies, identify people who need them, and for local stakeholders to appropriately provide products.**

The pilot suggests that rapid stakeholder consultations and AP review can feasibly develop provisional operating procedures for disability-inclusive AP supply for humanitarian response. Noting that while rapid consultation and collaboratively drafting guidelines can build consensus on the right pathways, these pathways need to be operationalised in practice, preferencing the experience of people with disability.

Stakeholders agreed success depends on the degree of 'bedding in' and operationalising key steps within local humanitarian mechanisms. Providing AP in emergencies depends on aligning AP provision within existing local mechanisms for transport, needs assessment and provision.

## 7. Meaningful OPD engagement is essential to a rights-based disability inclusive humanitarian response

**While appreciating the strong need for AP within humanitarian responses, we must not elevate the provision of AP as the sole indicator of disability inclusive responses.**

The pilot highlights the importance of OPD engagement within the whole response cycle, including in preparedness planning, needs analysis, accessible disaster response support and communications, and recovery efforts.

# Recommendations for moving forward

- Build on and 'bed in' provisional plans in pilot countries through targeted technical support, including integration of AP within needs assessment tools.
- Integrate AP logistics modules into disaster risk management (DRM) processes and training.
- Strengthen focus on AP access in disability-inclusive DRM processes, including supporting the voice of OPD's within decision making and product selection.
- Collaborate with other global AT actors (WHO, AT-Scale) to strengthen plans and guidance and advocate for disability inclusive humanitarian practice.
- Include AP and disability inclusion principles in briefings and training for local and international responders.



Image (left): Participants at OPD AP product consultation in Fiji, July 2023.

Image (right): The selected range of AP included for the HLC program.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Disability Forum, *Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper – Complete Series* (November 2024) <https://pacificdisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Preconditions-Issues-Paper-PDF-Complete-Series.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Myanmar and Vanuatu.

<sup>3</sup> Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu.

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action* (2019) [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action%2C 2019\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/IASC%20Guidelines%20on%20the%20Inclusion%20of%20Persons%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, *AT6 AND AT10: Facilitating Rapid Access to Priority Assistive technology in Emergencies*, [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/assistive-technology-2/emergencies---at/at6-at10-overview-revb.pdf?sfvrsn=44fbc3\\_1](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/assistive-technology-2/emergencies---at/at6-at10-overview-revb.pdf?sfvrsn=44fbc3_1)

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