

Whaikaha to Fund Sensory Items for the Autistic Community

Whaikaha will announce today that sensory items are reinstated as a valid use of carer support and individualised funding for disabled people.

The Autistic and wider Autism communities were shocked and overwhelmed by the sweeping changes to purchasing rules announced on 18 March.

At 9am today, Whaikaha will release clarifications and updates, which include the ability to purchase sensory items, tablet devices and noise cancelling headphones with funding.

This will come as a great relief to many Autistic people who rely on these items to regulate, and to families who also rely on the items as tools for respite.

Autism NZ met with Whaikaha's CE twice since the 18 March announcement, and once with the Minister for Disability Issues. In all meetings we stressed the need for these items for the Autistic community, and the essential role they can play in peoples' lives. More than a third of people accessing disability supports in New Zealand are Autistic, and so their needs must be front of mind when decisions affected the disabled community are made.

Today's announcement does not contain changes to the inability for carers to pay for accommodation to take a break. Many Autistic people cannot tolerate residential care services, or leaving their home for respite. So carers must be able to leave the home to avoid burnout or overwhelm, and the cost of a night in a domestic hotel is, in Autism NZ's opinion, a reasonable expense for someone providing millions of dollars of unpaid labour across a lifetime.

Autism NZ has gathered information from the community, and constituted the front line for the grief and fear people were experienced.

"My daughters funding has been used to purchase much needed sensory items, such as white noise machines, sensory swings, noise cancelling headphones and iPad. ALL of these have made a huge difference to not only her life but ours... My daughter won't tolerate any strangers in the home or assigned/employed to help with support care needs which makes bringing in a carer impossible. The burnout as her full time carer is very real and now the respite nights I used to attend are no longer allowed also. How will I get a break?"

Autism NZ is pleased to see progress and recognition of the voices of the community. We have a range of people willing to speak to media, and I can send through a list of contacts. Our CE Dane is also available for comment today.

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