

Fremantle Collaboration

The Fremantle Collaboration was formed at the 2006 ARATA Conference in Fremantle, where an interdisciplinary research team met to discuss their concerns about inequitable access to assistive technology systems for people with disabilities. It was during these initial discussions with international peers, that the group consolidated their proposal to investigate the economic framework for people with a disability and for the provision of specialist equipment for their needs.

Under the title *Assistive Technology in Australia: Economic analyses from a user standpoint – methodological implications*, the team won a UWS Research Partnership Program grant of A\$17,419 together with *Independent Living Centres Australia, the National Committee on Rehabilitation Engineering, and NovitaTech*.



Under this project, the team is developing over 2006-2007 three exploratory accounts of the economic actors involved with Assistive Technology (AT):

- (1) the people and institutions involved in prescribing and selecting AT devices based on clinical occupational therapists' expertise and experiences,
- (2) the people and institutions involved in the provision of various technical components of AT systems based on the expertise and experiences of a team of senior rehabilitation engineers,
- (3) the people and institutions explicitly or implicitly appearing in AT users' first person accounts of their daily lives as identified by economists.

In order to triangulate these accounts, the team is developing eight vignettes of economically significant types of AT users, as well as an inventory of methodologically relevant issues that need further research. In keeping with the Fremantle Collaboration's person centred approach, insights from standpoint theory and feminist economics have led the team to frame its research in the context of the World Health Organisation's *International Classification of Disability, Functioning and Health (ICF)*.

The team subsequently decided to develop an instrument for the economic analysis of AT systems, which compares the cost-effectiveness of a proposed/existing AT system with a socially and technically best or optimal solution identified by or together with the AT user concerned. This optimal solution is determined independent of cost considerations.

We hope this instrument can be developed for use by practitioners. It is planned to develop a CD that allows allied health practitioners to input information in a simple Excel spreadsheet to generate visual information on the cost and effectiveness of the activities that the AT user wishes to undertake. So the instrument will be developed from the standpoint of the AT user and in the context of the ICF, and hence it will be fully user-centred. It will also be internationally comparable and useable.

Undertaking economic analyses from a user standpoint allows the Fremantle Collaboration to take their analysis a step further and focus squarely on the costs that arise to society from the waste resulting from not providing AT on a needs basis, and also from not applying universal design principles more widely. From this perspective, the team intends to develop empirical studies locally, nationally and internationally in close cooperation with Independent Living Centres Australia and other international counterparts.

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