

MSD Disability Support Services Operational Policy

Assessment and Allocation of Disability Support Funding

Effective from 16 February 2026

Visual description: A green Disability Support Services logo sits to the left of the New Zealand Government crest in black.

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Purpose

1. This operational policy establishes the requirements for the assessment and allocation of Disability Support Services (DSS) funded supports.
2. This policy complements existing DSS policies and processes for assessment and funding allocation and to tighten fiscal management and oversight.

Scope of this policy

3. This operational policy applies to:
 - a. people seeking access to DSS-funded services for the first time; and
 - b. disabled people currently receiving disability support who require an urgent reassessment of the funding and services they have been allocated.

Commencement

4. This operational policy commences during February 2026:
 - a. From 16 February 2026, all provisions of the policy apply, **except** for Sections C – F.
 - b. From 23 February, all provisions of the policy apply, **including** Sections C – F, to align with the implementation of supporting tools.

Background

5. The assessment and allocation of disability support services is changing to support fairer, more consistent, transparent, and sustainable operational practice across the disability support system. The programme of change, as approved by Cabinet [SOU-25-MIN-0088 refers], aims to establish clearer and more consistent assessment and allocation settings that are clear and easy to navigate.
6. This operational policy represents the first step in that programme, introducing national consistency across the assessment and allocation of support funding. This ensures a clear link between the particular challenges/needs and circumstances of the disabled person, the services that are funded and coordinated, and the outcomes that matter most to disabled people, their family, whānau, guardians and/or carers.

7. These changes are intended to streamline operational processes, capture better data on how funding contributes to the intended outcomes for disabled people, and support stronger financial management, including enabling Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASCs) organisations and Enabling Good Lives (EGL) sites to manage their budgets more effectively.
8. Later phases will build on this foundation by continuing to refine assessment and allocation, introduce a tiered support framework for Individualised Funding Hosts supporting a disabled person or their agent to manage their funding, and transition people who already use disability support services onto the new approach to ensure consistent application of the process for all eligible people over time. This operational policy is expected to be updated as assessment and allocation processes are refined. Operational guidance to support NASC and EGL site application of the policy is expected to be developed once sufficient refinement has occurred.
9. NASCs and EGL sites work with the disabled person, their family, whānau, guardian, and/or carers to determine eligibility for DSS-funded support services. They work together to gather relevant information about the disabled person and identify what disability support services that are available.
10. NASCs and EGL sites are the gateway for disabled people and their family, whānau, guardians and/or carers to access DSS-funded disability supports.

A. Overarching responsibilities

11. This section outlines the overarching responsibilities in relation to the assessment and allocation of DSS-funded disability supports. More detailed responsibilities for each part of the process are set out in the relevant sections of this operational policy.

Disability Support Services overarching responsibilities

12. DSS is responsible for:
 - a. providing oversight and governance of the assessment and allocation framework to ensure national consistency and alignment with government priorities; and
 - b. developing and maintaining all DSS prescribed tools, operational policy, and DSS training material; and
 - c. monitoring system-level performance to ensure funding decisions operate within approved budgets, and that funding is used appropriately and consistently; and
 - d. providing timely support, guidance and training to NASC and EGL sites to enable correct application of process, policy and tools; and

- e. maintaining, protecting and managing information received and held by DSS in accordance with relevant privacy, information handling and record keeping requirements.

NASC and EGL sites overarching responsibilities

13. NASC and EGL sites are responsible for:
 - a. operating in accordance with this operational policy and with reference to any supporting operational guidance; and
 - b. ensuring staff have completed required training and are competent in the assessment and allocation processes, including use of the DSS prescribed tools; and
 - c. the quality, accuracy and completeness of all information input into the DSS prescribed tools and funding decisions; and
 - d. ensuring disabled people and, where appropriate, their family, whānau, guardians and/or carers, give informed consent and have the opportunity to review information to confirm it is accurate and relevant to support assessment and allocation; and
 - e. entering complete, timely records of information into relevant systems; and
 - f. maintaining, protecting and managing information in accordance with relevant privacy, information handling and record keeping requirements; and
 - g. providing information to DSS, as required, to support monitoring, reporting and system oversight; and
 - h. informing Providers and Individualised Funding Hosts about a disabled person's My DSS Funding Plan, including the purposes for which the funding may be used.
14. As set out in the *Operational Policy and Guidelines 2025/26 Financial Year Management of NASC and EGL Site Budgets*, NASCs and EGL sites must manage the allocation of funding within their annual budgets, including making final decisions by applying relevant policies and tools appropriately and prioritising within regional budgets.
15. NASCs must operate in accordance with their contractual obligations in the Service Specification: DSS Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination Including Discretionary Funding.

Disabled people (family, whānau, guardians and/or carers) overarching responsibilities

16. Disabled people and, where appropriate, their family, whānau, guardians and/or carers are responsible for engaging with their NASC or EGL site to

provide accurate and relevant information to support assessment and allocation.

B. Preparation for assessment

Purpose

17. Preparation for assessment ensures that a disabled person is eligible for assessment and, together with their family, whānau, guardian and/or carer where appropriate, is provided with information about the assessment process through an assessment information pack so they know what to expect and how to prepare.

Confirming eligibility for assessment

18. Before progressing a person for an assessment and providing information about their assessment, NASC and EGL sites must confirm that the person is eligible for assessment. This includes confirming that:
 - a. the person is eligible for publicly funded health and disability services in New Zealand in accordance with the *Health and Disability Services Eligibility Direction 2011*; and
 - b. sufficient evidence has been received to support identification of an impairment type specified in the DSS Eligibility Operational Policy, for example, a clinical diagnosis.
19. Full eligibility for DSS-funded disability support services will continue to be confirmed during assessment.

Preparation for assessment responsibilities

NASC and EGL sites

20. NASC and EGL sites must:
 - a. confirm the person's eligibility for assessment, in accordance with paragraph 18; and
 - b. engage with the person, their family, whānau, guardian and/or carer to discuss the requirements for an assessment, including timing, location and any support needed to ensure full participation in the assessment conversation; and
 - c. complete and provide the relevant DSS-prescribed letter template and information sheet (assessment information pack) to the disabled person, their family, whānau, guardian and/or carer, ensuring all required fields are completed and content is not altered except where it may be necessary to reflect a disabled person's circumstances; and
 - d. ensure any information included in the assessment information pack is limited to what is relevant to the upcoming assessment; and

- e. record eligibility confirmation and preparation for assessment outcomes in relevant systems.

Disability Support Services

21. DSS must make available the assessment information pack (standardised letter templates and information sheets) for use by NASCs and EGL sites.

C. Assessment

Purpose

22. This section sets out the requirements for NASC and EGL sites to collect, review, and confirm information gathered from the disabled person, their family, whānau, guardians and/or carers during the assessment conversation, and to record that information in an Outcome Based Indicative Range web application (OBIR web app).¹

Assessment responsibilities

NASCs and EGL sites

23. NASC and EGL sites must:
 - a. record informed consent from the disabled person, or their family, whānau, guardian or carer, prior to commencing the assessment; and
 - b. record assessment information in the OBIR web app by answering the questions, ensuring the information is complete, accurate and current in the formats required; and
 - c. review and confirm all the information recorded in the OBIR web app with the disabled person, family, whānau, guardian and/or carer; and
 - d. review the application of relevant policies and tools, and ensure the quality of information entered into the OBIR web app; and
 - e. submit the completed OBIR to DSS for calculation of the indicative range.

Disabled person (family, whānau, guardian and/or carer)

24. The disabled person, their family, whānau, guardian and/or carer must review and confirm that the information recorded in the OBIR web app is accurate.

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25. Until such time as the OBIR web app is developed to calculate indicative funding ranges, DSS must:

¹ The OBIR web app supports transparent and evidence-informed assessment practice by providing a structured set of questions to record assessment information in a nationally consistent way.

- a. use the OBIR Excel spreadsheet to calculate the indicative range for a disabled person, using the information received from NASCs and EGL sites through the OBIR web app; and
- b. endeavour to return the indicative funding range to the relevant NASC or EGL site within 24 to 48 hours of receipt, counted over business days, unless further information is required from the NASC or EGL site to complete the calculation.

D. Allocation

Purpose

26. The indicative range provides NASCs and EGL sites a benchmark against which to determine a reasonable contribution towards supporting a disabled person given the barriers they experience. The indicative range reflects the level of support typically funded for disabled people in similar circumstances and is intended to be applied in most cases to enable nationally consistent decisions.
27. In exceptional circumstances, the indicative range produced by the OBIR Excel may not adequately reflect a person's individual circumstances. In these cases, an adjustment may be required to ensure the funding allocation represents a reasonable and appropriate contribution to the person's supports.
28. This section sets out the responsibilities of NASC and EGL sites in reviewing, agreeing, and where justified, adjusting the indicative range.

Allocation responsibilities

NASCs and EGL sites

29. NASC and EGL sites must:
 - a. review the indicative range calculated by DSS to confirm it reasonably reflects known information about the disabled person that was recorded in the OBIR web app; and
 - b. accept the indicative range as the benchmark for funding where it is reasonable and appropriate for the disabled person's circumstances; and
 - c. only adjust the indicative range in exceptional circumstances when the indicative range provided by DSS does not reasonably and appropriately reflect the disabled person's circumstances, and the adjustment can be clearly justified in accordance with the criteria outlined in the *Adjustment of the Indicative Range* section (see below); and
 - d. document the rationale for any adjustments, including the factors considered and evidence used; and
 - e. ensure the completed assessment and indicative range is reviewed and approved in accordance with internal review and approval processes.

Exceptional circumstance adjustments to the Indicative Range

30. Exceptional circumstances adjustments to the indicative range may only be considered in situations such as:
 - a. Where the costs of providing safe and effective support exceed the general market costs.
 - b. Where environmental or other risks create extraordinary support costs.
31. Any adjustments must be:
 - a. reasonable, proportionate, and informed by evidence; and
 - b. clearly documented, including the rationale, factors considered, and evidence used.

E. My DSS Funding Plan

Purpose

32. A My DSS Funding Plan records how a disabled person's funding, within the allocated indicative range, is intended to be used, as agreed between the NASC or EGL site and the disabled person (and where appropriate, their family, whānau, guardian and/or carer). It provides a shared understanding of the intended purposes and outcomes, and the supports intended to achieve these. The plan must be clear to ensure disabled people know how they can use their funding and to support monitoring.

My DSS funding plan responsibilities

NASCs and EGL sites

33. NASC and EGL sites must:
 - a. complete a My DSS Funding Plan collaboratively with the disabled person, family, whānau, guardian and/or carer, ensuring all required information is recorded to support implementation, monitoring and reporting; and
 - b. ensure the disabled person's My DSS Funding Plan reflects the outcomes and support needs identified through assessment; and
 - c. support the disabled person, and where appropriate their family, whānau, guardian and carer, to make informed decisions about support options, including understanding trade-offs and affordability within the available funding range; and
 - d. ensure the total cost of the supports included in the My DSS Funding Plan is within the agreed funding range unless an exceptional circumstances' adjustment has been made; and
 - e. ensure funding packages are submitted to the Review Panel for consideration where this is required by its Terms of Reference; and

- f. confirm the My DSS Funding Plan with the disabled person, family, whānau, guardian and/or carer; and
- g. where the disabled person has chosen to manage the use of their allocated funding and subject to the requirements in the *conditions and prior approval requirements* section below:
 - i. Ensure all proposed supports meet the inclusion conditions and are suitable to be included in a My DSS Funding Plan.
 - ii. Identify any supports that require the disabled person to seek prior approval before funding can be spent and ensure the rationale and any evidence is documented in the My DSS Funding Plan; and
- h. ensure relevant DSS contracted providers and Individualised Funding Hosts are provided with the disabled person's My DSS Funding Plan and made aware of the purposes and requirements for which the funding can be spent; and
- i. monitor expenditure to ensure that funding is used in accordance with the My DSS Funding Plan and continues to meet the person's needs through the allocation period, taking into account feedback from Hosts where applicable (see section 45); and
- j. review and update the My DSS Funding Plan as required to reflect changes in needs, circumstances or agreed outcomes.

Disabled person and/or family, whānau, guardian and carer

34. The disabled person and/or their family, whānau, guardian and carer must:
- a. participate in any planning discussions to inform the development of the My DSS Funding Plan; and
 - b. confirm and agree to the My DSS Funding Plan before it is finalised; and
 - c. advise their Host, or relevant NASC or EGL site, promptly if their circumstances or disability needs change that may affect their My DSS Funding Plan, or they wish to discuss a change to the purpose for which funding has been allocated.

Conditions and prior approval requirements

35. This section applies to funding allocated in a My DSS Funding Plan that is managed by the disabled person through the following services:
- a. Individualised Funding – Personal Care, Household Management, and Respite
 - b. Enhanced Individualised Funding
 - c. Carer Support

- d. EGL Personal Budget – excluding funding used to purchase supports or services from a DSS-contracted provider.
36. For all expenditure before 31 March 2026, all spending under this section must comply with the *Purchasing Rules* (see [Understanding the purchasing guidelines | Disability Support Services](#)).
37. From 1 April 2026, the Purchasing Rules no longer apply. Instead, funding allocated in a My DSS Funding Plan for expenditure on or after 1 April 2026 must meet the conditions outlined below.

Inclusion conditions

38. For a support to be included in a My DSS Funding Plan, it must be reasonably attributable to the person’s disability that makes them eligible for DSS-funded supports.
39. NASCs and EGL sites must consider supports available from other government agencies before including supports of a similar form or intent in a disabled person’s My DSS Funding Plan and document any evidence of this consideration.

Prior approval conditions

40. The following types of supports may be included in a My DSS Funding Plan but require the disabled person to obtain approval before spending the funding:
- a. Safety considerations – equipment that could pose a risk of harm may only be included if a health professional operating within the scope of their practice confirms it is safe, supported by evidence, and any risk managed.
 - b. Complementary therapies – those which are not publicly funded should only be included if recommended by a health professional operating within the scope of their practice, supported by evidence, and any risk managed. A trial may be required to demonstrate efficacy before ongoing inclusion in a My DSS Funding Plan.
 - c. Material expenditure above a certain threshold or of a particular sensitivity, such as:
 - i. Overseas travel
 - ii. Purchase of items over a certain dollar threshold as published on the DSS website.
 - iii. Repeat purchase of items of a similar nature or intent, before the expected life of an item has expired.
41. DSS will publish the thresholds above which prior approval is required on its website. Those thresholds may be updated from time to time and communicated to NASCs, EGL sites and Hosts.

Application of prior approval conditions

42. The disabled person must obtain prior approval for the supports under 40:
 - a. from their Host, where they are supported by a Host; or
 - b. from their NASC or EGL site, where they are not supported by a Host.
43. When considering whether to approve overseas travel under 41(c)(i), the Host, or NASC or EGL site, must consider:
 - a. that the costs associated with the travel are directly attributable to the challenges arising from the disability, meaning they are costs over and above those that would have been incurred if they person did not have a disability; and
 - b. that the travel is consistent with, and likely to achieve, the purpose and outcomes identified in the disabled person's My DSS Funding Plan; and
 - c. that approving the travel will not compromise the disabled person's ability to access future supports; and
 - d. that funding the travel is in accordance with the *Health and Disability Services Eligibility Direction 2011*.
44. Approval of overseas travel does not create any obligation on the Host agency, NASC or EGL site to arrange, coordinate, or provide supports outside of New Zealand. The disabled person is responsible for arranging any required supports while overseas.

Individualised Funding Hosts

Individualised Funding Host responsibilities

45. Where a disabled person has chosen Individualised Funding with a Host, the Host must:
 - a. support the disabled person to manage their funding in accordance with their My DSS Funding Plan.
 - b. monitor and report on expenditure against the disabled person's My DSS Funding Plan and escalate any issues to the relevant NASC or EGL site.

F. Urgent Reassessment

46. An urgent reassessment should be considered where a disabled person experiences, or is reasonably expected to experience, a change in circumstances that poses an immediate or imminent risk to their safety or wellbeing.
47. Immediate or imminent risk may include situations where:
 - a. the disabled person's basic living needs cannot be met safely

- b. there is risk of accident, injury, exploitation, or other harm, or
 - c. a primary care giver is no longer available, or other changes in circumstances are expected to result in immediate risk.
48. For urgent reassessments, the preparation for assessment requirements in Section B do not apply. The NASC or EGL site arranges the assessment with the disabled person, their family, whānau, guardian and/or carer, and then proceeds with the requirements set out in Section C (assessment) and subsequent sections.
49. NASCs and EGL sites must record, in relevant systems, the reason for the urgent reassessment and the scheduling details.
50. Non-urgent reassessments are temporarily paused until further notice.

G. Resolving disagreements

51. Where a disagreement arises in relation to assessment information, indicative ranges, or funding decisions, NASC and EGL sites must manage the disagreement in accordance with their usual complaints and review processes, having regard to their contractual responsibilities.

H. Training and support

52. NASC and EGL site staff must be trained on the improved assessment and allocation process, including using the OBIR web app. DSS will provide initial training to designated NASC and EGL site trainers, who will then deliver training within their own organisations.
53. Where there are further updates to the assessment and allocation process, training materials will be reviewed and updated accordingly. Depending on the extent of any change, DSS may provide additional training to support consistent implementation.

I. Privacy, information handling and record keeping

54. The OBIR web app and Excel, including all associated intellectual property, is owned by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and must only be used for its intended purpose. They must not be disclosed to any third party unless explicit authorisation has been granted by MSD.
55. Information collected to fulfil the requirements of this Operational Policy must be handled and managed in accordance with the *Privacy Act 2020*, the *Health Information Privacy Code 2020*, *Public Records Act 2005*, all applicable laws and the *Temporary Care Records Protection Instruction* and any general notice or instruction issued by Archives New Zealand (Archive Instruction). For

NASCs, the requirements of the *NASC Service Specification – DSS Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination (DSS1040) Including Discretionary Funding (DSS1039D)* also apply.

56. Information recorded in the OBIR web app is to be provided to the disabled person, family, whānau, guardian and/or carer to confirm information has been accurately recorded or, upon later request, using the assessment summary view available in the OBIR web app.
57. Information held about a disabled person should only be shared to the extent necessary to determine and deliver the required supports and be in accordance with privacy requirements and restrictions on the use of the OBIR web app and Excel.

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Glossary: Terms and definitions

Term	Description
DSS	Disability Support Services (MSD Business Group).
EGL	Enabling Good Lives
Host	Individualised Funding Host provider – a contracted DSS provider who provides host services to a person. They assist a person to purchase and manage their support allocation.
MSD	Ministry of Social Development
My DSS Funding Plan	Records the agreed intended use of a person’s DSS-funded disability supports and gives effect to the confirmed funding allocation.
NASC	Needs Assessment and Service Coordination organisation
OBIR Excel spreadsheet	The Outcomes Based Indicative Range (OBIR) excel translates assessment information into an indicative funding range.
OBIR web app	The web-based application used by NASCs and EGL sites for the purposes of recording assessment information, requesting an indicative funding range, and creating and maintaining My DSS Funding Plans for disabled people.
Purchasing Rules	The set of rules that determined how DSS funding can be used, as in effect on 24 April 2024. Understanding the purchasing guidelines Disability Support Services
Temporary Care Records Protection Instruction	Issued by the Chief Archivist in March 2024, this protection instruction withdraws and replaces the disposal moratorium on records relevant to the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry. The instruction is to protect care records while work is undertaken to review the retention and disposal of State care records.