

**Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS)
Communication Devices**

Frequently Asked Questions

**Applying for MASS funding – why trial a
communication device?**

What does MASS do?

- MASS provides subsidy funding to eligible applicants for a range of communication devices.

How does an applicant get a MASS funded communication device?

- A speech pathologist applies for a communication device on behalf of an applicant.

What does the application process involve?

A speech pathologist will:

- Check administrative eligibility e.g. Centrelink pensioner concession card
- Assess the communication needs of the applicant
- Trial suitable devices with the applicant
- Complete and submit forms on behalf of the applicant.

Why does MASS require applicants to trial communication devices?

- MASS wants the best outcome for the applicant
- Research tells us that this is achieved by trialing a number of different communication devices
- There is a very large range of device options available, especially speech generating devices
- Speech generating devices vary in several ways, including:
 - overall appearance e.g. size, weight, screen or keyboard display, etc.
 - the way they display, store and organise the letters, words, phrases, symbols or pictures
 - the way an applicant can use the device e.g. using their fingers/hands/stylus; using a switch and scanning array; using a headpointing accessory; using an eye gaze accessory, etc.
 - the choice of voice (either recorded or synthesised) and volume.

What makes for a good trial?

For the speech pathologist to:

- Involve the applicant, their family and team at all stages
- Conduct a thorough assessment of needs
- Consult with the applicant, family and team in the selection of devices for trials
- Trial those devices for a minimum of two weeks each
- Prepare for the trial by getting equipment set up and ready

- Trial the devices in a number of different environments (e.g. home, school, work and community) and with a number of different people (e.g. family members, teachers, support workers, local shopkeepers, etc.)
- In consultation with the family and team, observe these different interactions and keep records of how well the applicant succeeded in communicating their message, with each device
- Consult the applicant about their own experiences of using the devices and which device they prefer and why
- Show the applicant, their family and team how to program the device and set up any other equipment. The applicant, family and team need to be confident that they can, or will learn to, program and maintain the device
- In consultation with the applicant, family and team, review all the information from the trials and make an informed decision about which device will be the most suitable.

How long will the trials take?

- The entire process of assessment and trial of a range of devices may take a few months, but each trial itself will be from two to four weeks in duration
- A detailed trial might take time to complete but is essential to determine the best device for the applicant's needs. Taking shortcuts on the time taken for assessment and trial might increase the risk of choosing an inappropriate device that does not best meet the applicant's needs.

What are the risks of not conducting a good trial?

- Choosing a device that is not suitable for the applicant's language and communication needs
- Choosing a device that the applicant cannot use effectively
- Choosing a device that does not work in a range of different environments
- Choosing a device that cannot adapt to meet an applicant's changing needs
- Choosing a device that the applicant and team are unable to program, set up and support.

What are the benefits of a good trial?

- A good trial will ensure a device is chosen that best meets the applicant's needs and is a "system for today and a system for tomorrow" (Beukelman and Mirenda).

What support is available?

- MASS employs a Principal Clinical Advisor, Communication Aids, who is available to discuss the trial process
- MASS provides information on their website, specifically a document titled, "MASS Communication Aids Trials Information and Proforma"
<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/mass/docs/forms/emasscomtrialjul10.doc>

How do I find out more about MASS?

- For further information about MASS, you can visit the MASS website at www.health.qld.gov.au/mass or contact your nearest MASS office in Brisbane or Mackay.