

Guide to Reasonable and Necessary (R & N) decisions

Topic: Smoke alarm supports for children who are deaf or hard of hearing

We have used the words 'deaf or hard of hearing' in most of these examples. We acknowledge the terms deafness and hearing impairment mean different things to different people. Deaf is the preferred term used by people who use Australian Sign Language (Auslan) as a primary or preferred communication method and who identify themselves as a member of the signing Deaf community. It's used to describe their unique cultural identity which is a result of their rich visual language and is used with pride. In this case the D in Deaf is capitalised.

Many in the Deaf community regard the terms 'hearing impairment' and 'hearing loss' as alienating and damaging because it implies deafness needs to be 'fixed'.

We acknowledge that people will make their own choice about how they describe themselves and their disability or cultural identity.

Case Example

Brett is 14 years old and has severe, permanent hearing loss in both ears. He wears hearing aids which he takes out at night and sometimes while studying. Brett is becoming more independent, which means he is home alone more often, particularly after school before his parents get home from work.

The family home is fitted with standard audible smoke alarms which Brett can't hear unless he is wearing his hearing aids.

Brett's audiologist has recommended adding a visual and tactile alert to the smoke alarm with a strobe light and bed shaker, and a visual alert for the doorbell.

Would we fund this?

Yes, visual and tactile alerting systems are NDIS supports. We would typically fund visual and tactile alerting systems for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing where it meets [reasonable and necessary criteria](#). The smoke alarm package is reasonable and necessary for Brett in this situation. This includes the cost of installing the systems. The planner adds the funding as low-cost assistive technology to the Core budget in Brett's plan.

Why would we fund this?

We fund **NDIS supports**. NDIS laws determine what we can and can't fund. Things we can fund are called [NDIS supports](#). You can use the funding in your plan to buy NDIS supports if they are related to your disability and are in-line with your plan.

To work out if funding for an alerting system or smoke alarm is reasonable and necessary, we'll look at the information you give us against the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#).

Standard visual and tactile alerting systems and smoke alarms for people who are deaf or hard of hearing will usually meet the disability support needs of participants who are deaf or hard of hearing as a standard level of support. They can connect wirelessly through radio frequency transmissions to other devices, such as vibration pads you can place under a pillow to provide tactile or physical alert at night, and flash receivers or strobe lights that provide a visual alert during the day.

Some states and territories provide a subsidy program for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to upgrade their smoke alarms. You can contact your local fire service to learn more.

What else do we think about?

The NDIS supports your child needs will depend on their age, stage of development, goals, and their level of hearing. It will also depend on if your child has any other NDIS support needs. For example, if your child is hard of hearing and has a vision impairment, we would consider a smoke alarm or alerting system that provides both visual and tactile notification.

Other factors we think about include:

- Any additional cognitive, emotional, behavioural, or physical aspects that may affect your child's response to danger if the alarm is triggered, where there could be a potential risk of harm.
- Any systems in place for family members with similar requirements that could be extended, for example, a bed shaker and strobe light only if fire alarms are already in place.
- Is it the responsibility of other state funding programs to provide a subsidy for purchasing an alerting system or smoke alarm for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Case Example

Mae is 3 years old with a mild hearing loss in her left ear, diagnosed at birth. She wears a hearing aid in that ear, which she takes out at night. Mae communicates using oral English and attends kindergarten. She has two older siblings and is the only member of her family who is hard of hearing.

Mae's parents have taught their children some basic fire safety. They are confident if there was a fire, Mae would get out of the house to the family meeting point. Their only concern is that Mae might not be able to hear the standard audible smoke alarms. The family are requesting a smoke alarm for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, with a strobe light and bed shaker.

Would we fund this?

No, in this case we would typically not fund a smoke alarm with a strobe light and bed shaker for Mae. This is because it doesn't meet the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#).

Why won't we fund this?

The planner considers the information provided, along with the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#) and determines the support should not be funded because:

- Mae has a mild degree of hearing loss in left ear. She can hear a standard smoke alarm with and without her hearing aid.
- Mae's parents have a parental responsibility to ensure her safety in the case of a fire. Smoke alarms are one of the devices that help them keep Mae safe during a fire, but Mae's safety doesn't depend on the smoke alarm.

What else do we think about?

Mae's parents have provided reports that show Mae doesn't require support in relation to other aspects of her life apart from her hearing loss.

Case Example

Milo is 7 years old and has severe permanent hearing loss in both ears. He wears hearing aids most of the day and attends a mainstream school. Milo's family want him to have the same opportunities and experiences as other children his age. At home, Milo does not notice some everyday sounds, such as a phone ringing and the doorbell. His parents have asked for funding for a flashing doorbell so Milo will know when someone is at the front door. They have also asked for a visual and vibrating smoke alarm for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, to alert him in an emergency.

Milo's family have found several suitable visual and vibrating smoke alarms and doorbells that are between \$900 and \$2,500. Milo's planner explains if the visual and vibrating smoke alarm and doorbell assistive technology is under \$1,500, they don't need to provide a quote or written evidence.

Would we fund this?

Yes, we would typically fund visual and vibrating smoke alarm and doorbell to assist a child who is deaf or hard of hearing where it meets the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#).

Why would we fund this?

To work out if funding for visual and tactile alerting systems are reasonable and necessary for your child and family, we look at the information you give us against the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#). Once we determine that the support meets this criteria, we would consider if the device also meets our [assistive technology funding criteria](#).

What else do we think about?

The support your child needs will depend on their age, stage of development, goals, and level of hearing. We will also consider any reasonable alternative or mainstream options that may be available to you and your child.

For more information, refer to:

- [Our Guideline – Reasonable and necessary supports](#)
- [Our Guideline – Assistive technology](#)
- [Our Guideline – Principles we follow to create your plan](#)
- [Our Guideline – Creating your plan](#)
- [Smoke Alarm Subsidy Scheme – Deaf Connect](#)
- [Smoke Alarm Subsidy – Expression Australia](#)