

Choosing a professional to work with you or a family member with deafblindness

It is common for people with deafblindness or family members of children and adults with deafblindness to want advice about how to choose a professional to work with them or their family member with deafblindness. This is not as easy as it sounds as each service user is an individual and their needs will vary from others. This information sheet aims to provide some general information and a range of questions that you can ask a professional when you contact them to arrange an appointment.

Professionals who commonly work with people with deafblindness include:

- Audiologist
- Dieticians
- Occupational Therapists
- Orientation and Mobility Specialists
- Orthoptists
- Physiotherapists
- Psychologists
- Speech Pathologists
- Social Workers
- Auslan Interpreter

Do I need a referral?

Generally, you do not need a referral to see an allied health professional. You might need a referral from a GP or paediatrician if you would like to access funding sources e.g. NDIS, Chronic Disease Management program.

What is the cost?

Allied health professionals can determine their own fee schedule. When determining a fee schedule, they may base their fees on factors such as their costs to run the business, experience etc. Allied health professionals may charge different fees for a range of services including assessment, therapy (individual or group), attendance at meetings, tele-health consultations, report writing, travel, presentations, non-attendance at a session, provision of materials, additional administrative tasks etc.

Membership of professional associations and registers

Membership of professional bodies such as the Australian Health Practitioner Registration Agency, or Speech Pathology Australia for example is the only way of ensuring that the professional has:

- obtained the appropriate qualifications, and
- has currency of practice

Finding a suitable professional to work with you or your family member

It can be difficult finding professionals with experience in deafblindness. A possible way of finding a suitable therapist is to ask others with similar disabilities if they have had a good experience with any particular professionals. You might also want to reach out to diagnosis

specific groups such as the CHARGE Syndrome Association of Australasia or Usher Kids Australia.

Other relevant professionals

This information sheet has focused on allied health professionals and interpreters. Other professionals who commonly work with people with deafblindness include Communication Guides (support workers with skills and training in working with people with deafblindness), communication advisors, and technology trainers. These professionals are not typically required to be members of professional associations or registers, but it is expected the below questions will also be useful in finding these professionals who best meet your individual needs.

Questions which may be useful to ask to assist you in finding the right professional for you

- How many years' experience do you have in the disability field?
- Have you worked with people with deafblindness (combined vision and hearing impairment) before?
- Have you undertaken any training in deafblindness / CHARGE syndrome / Usher syndrome (or whatever is relevant in your case)?
- Are you willing to undertake further training in deafblindness / CHARGE syndrome / Usher syndrome (or whatever is relevant in your case)?
- Are you familiar with Auslan (if relevant)?

Adapted from information sheet developed by Speech Pathology Australia: Choosing a Speech Pathologist information Sheet.