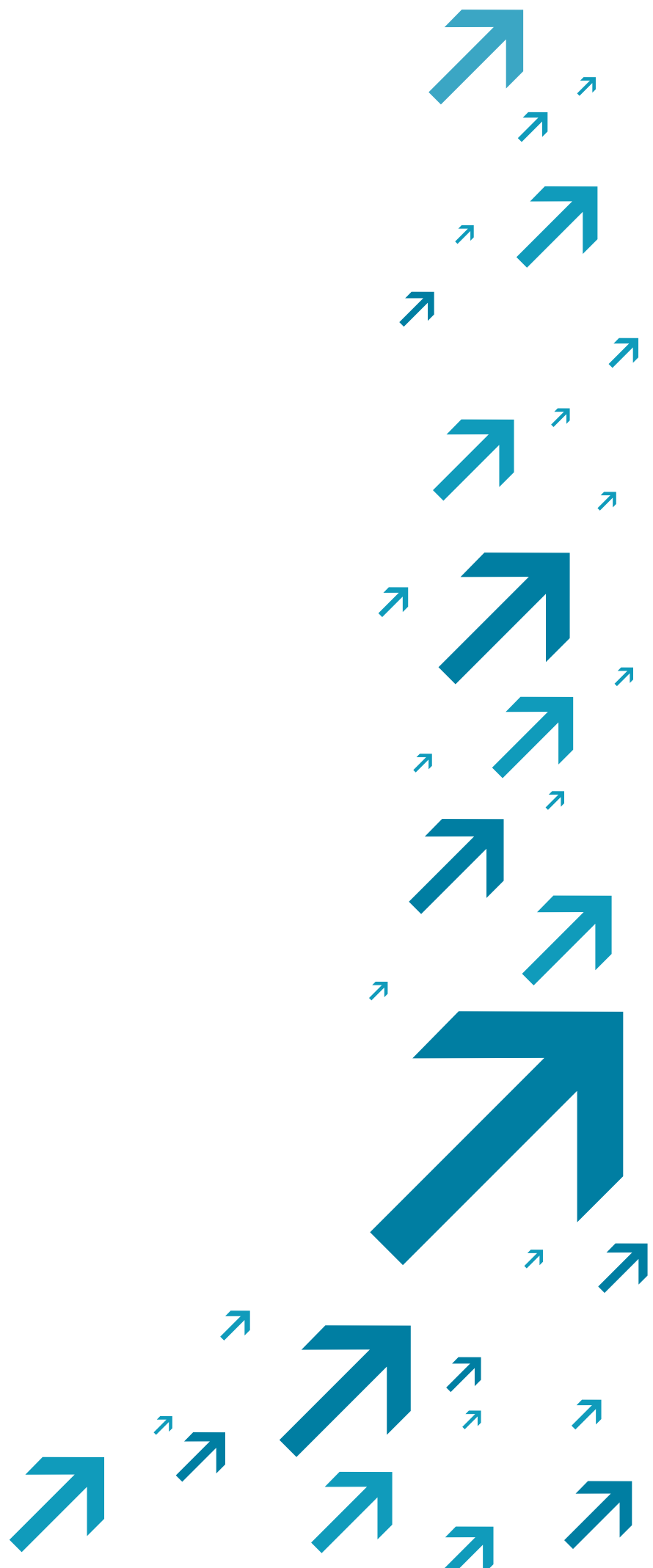


Self-directed supports and services

Conversations that matter





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➤ Introduction

Self-directed supports and services describe the way community services can be provided. People who use these community services have control, influence and decision-making over the services they require. This paper provides insight into the possibilities of self-directed services. It has been developed to promote understanding of the self-directed services concept, particularly amongst people who use, provide or fund disability services in Western Australia. The paper aims to:

- clarify the meaning of self-directed supports and services
- inform and promote discussion
- encourage progressing a self-directed supports and services agenda.

➤ Background

Across Australia there is a growing interest in reshaping the systems that provide support and services for people with disability and their families and carers. Many of the people who use these systems are seeking a much greater level of control over the design, planning and delivery of services. They are also seeking a more individualised and personalised approach in which services and supports are tailored to their particular requirements. People are seeking supports and services that allow them to maintain and develop their existing lifestyle, friends and interests. These trends are consistent with developments in other parts of the world.

This reshaping of support and services reflects a growing realisation that better outcomes are achieved when people with disability and their supporters have genuine control. This includes decision-making and choice about the supports they require to address their needs and to pursue their goals. Within this changing environment, governments, service provider organisations, people with disability and family are being challenged to reconsider the fundamentals of existing service systems and to make adjustments that reflect the changing needs and expectations of people with disability, families and carers.

The West Australian Government ([see reference number 1 on page 7](#)) has committed to improving outcomes for citizens by reconsidering the role of governments and community services.

The Economic Audit Committee (EAC) envisaged that West Australians seeking services will exercise control over the range of services they access and the means by which they are delivered.

Self-directed service design and delivery affords greater opportunities for individuals, families and communities to have a significant say in how services are designed and delivered. This is a break from the historical model of service provision. The EAC identified a range of benefits in heading down the path of self-directed service design, including providing individuals with greater empowerment to make decisions about matters that affect their lives, avoiding the 'learned helplessness' that government intervention can create and improved outcomes for individuals by responsive service provision. The EAC recommended the progressive implementation of pilots of self-directed service design and delivery for individuals, families, carers and communities.

Broad outcomes expected from the implementation of this recommendation include:

- service delivery which is more effective and responsive to citizen needs
- constructive debate in the public sector and in the community about the understanding and merits of self-directed service design
- extensive discussion in the public sector and in the community about applying self-directed service design to different areas of policy and service delivery
- the introduction of alternative approaches to service delivery
- financially viable service models for service delivery agencies.

➤ Elements of a self-directed approach

The term 'self-directed supports and services' describes a general approach to developing supports with individuals rather than applying a prescriptive service delivery model. Genuinely shifting to self-directed services requires a focus on empowering people to define the support they prefer. It is about giving people with disability and their supporters more of a say about what they need and how services work for them.

Self-directed services aim to shift the service user role from passive consumer to a partner or director of their support arrangements. It requires a shift in the balance of power and gives people who use services a 'say'. This means working to get a more tailored approach to each person's needs. People would not be forced to take all the control of their service.

While the approach does not lend itself to a precise description, self-directed services can be identified by certain fundamental characteristics. These include:

- personalised approaches to planning, design and implementation, with the person (and their families and carers) at the centre of decision-making
- genuine choice and decision-making by the people about the supports and services they use
- the option for people using services to determine the level of information and control they have over resources and funding.

These characteristics are based on the following fundamental principles:

- Individuals and their families have a natural authority. They are usually best placed to identify the support and services required to address their needs.
- All individuals are entitled to a quantity of control and respect. Accordingly, all people should be given the opportunity to engage in self-determination and with additional support where appropriate or required.
- The skills and capabilities of the individual and their supporters are a rich resource that should be built into support arrangements.
- Service systems should seek to support the individual's holistic life needs and goals rather than addressing narrowly defined needs.
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach that is suitable for all individuals.

These principles are consistent with the Disability Services Act 1993.

➤ Current situation in Western Australia

Western Australia is well placed to accept the challenge of moving towards a more self-directed approach in disability services. Many of the developments in the local service system over the past 15 years have been consistent with the principles that underpin self-directed approaches. These include:

- the introduction and development of the Local Area Coordination program
- investment in person-centred planning processes
- individualised funding as the primary mechanism for allocating resources for supports and services
- direct funding allocated via Local Area Coordination
- self-managed funding allocated via disability sector organisations through the Shared Management Model
- initiatives such as community and family living
- a growing interest and examples of piloting more personalised service approaches
- the growth and development of a strong disability services sector.

➤ Misconceptions about self-directed services

As with any emerging concept, there can be misunderstanding about its intention, meaning and application. It is important to maintain meaningful dialogue to ensure the intended outcomes are achieved. Some of the common misconceptions about self-directed supports and services include:

- **It is only for people who can manage their own supports.**

The concept of self-directed supports and services is underpinned by the principle that it benefits all West Australians. It is based on the premise that people are in the best position to define their needs (and support requirements).

Self-directed supports and services are not intended to increase the pressure on individuals and families by making them responsible for everything, in relation to their services. It is about empowering people to have a say and as much control as works for them. It aims to give people control of the things that matter most to them.

For example, some people may feel strongly about having a say in designing when and how support is provided. People may want control over who provides support, such as the selection of support staff and how finances are allocated. Other people may want to leave the selection of support staff up to an organisation, with some guidance about the qualities and skills of the right person.

Some people may want to oversee their funding by getting regular statements and balances of their funding from the organisation (so they can direct the organisation how to best expend the

funding to meet their needs). Others may want to manage their own funding and employ their own supports.

- **It is not relevant for all people, for example those with a significant disability and/or with a limited voice.**

Self-directed supports and services are for all people. This may mean that some people (who are particularly vulnerable) require support from people who know them well and have their best interest at heart. It may also mean that there are some people who require some form of independent advocacy or practical support to ensure their voice is heard. It is important that people who have limited communication have at least some people who know them well and understand their preferences. These people can support the person to have a say.

- **It is only for people and services that are interested in individual approaches.**

The self-directed services agenda is not just for people who want to undertake individualised service approaches. It's for everyone. It means that no matter what services a person uses, they get a say and have influence over their services and supports.

- **It means service providers are less important.**

The idea of self-directed services does not mean that service providers are less important. Disability services will remain central to supporting many people to achieve their aspirations and live a good life.

Self-directed services and supports may mean that service providers need to change and develop new ways of working with people. It will require effort and

good communication to ensure there is enough time for people to understand how everyone will work together.

It may mean service provider organisations will be challenged to provide supports in ways they had not previously thought possible. It may involve piloting and refining new ways of working together.

Sometimes for individuals and families it may not be possible to provide the service they prefer and compromise may be required. Service providers have a critical role in progressing self-directed supports and service.

- **It is about cutting costs.**

The promotion of self-directed services is not driven by an effort to cut costs. It is driven by the principle that people will get better outcomes. This should lead to more efficient use of public funds and value for money.

- **It means individuals and families are left to do everything.**

The self-directed supports and services agenda is underpinned by the motivation to improve outcomes for individuals and families. It is not intended or expected to put further work or pressure on individuals and families. It is about giving people a greater say in their supports and services and control over the things that are important to them.

- **It is about giving all the funding and resource directly to individuals and families.**

This is not the intention of the self-directed supports and services agenda. Some people may want greater control of resources however others may not consider this important.

➤ Promoting self-directed services

A system that is built on self-directed principles has the potential to benefit people using services, people providing services, government agencies and the wider West Australian community. The full potential of this approach will only be realised if all parties are willing to make changes to enable people with disability and their supporters to have a greater say in the design and delivery of supports.

What will need to change or develop to support a system based on self-directed supports and services?

Individual and families

Individuals and families need information about what supports and services are possible. They may require opportunities to build new types of relationships with service provider organisations. Individuals and families need the opportunity to influence supports and service design. Some people, who are particularly vulnerable, may require intentional strategies such as formal advocacy to ensure they have the opportunity to have their voice heard.

Assumptions will need to be tested, to work out what is possible and what is required. People using services will also be challenged to move beyond the traditional service provider–service recipient model to consider the potential of a new model of service provision. A much better balance between natural and formal support should be encouraged. People who have been involved in a system or surrounded by community expectation that doesn't acknowledge their full potential may need encouragement and support to have the confidence to do things differently.

Individuals and families may require practical support to decide how they want to develop and influence support and service design. They need the flexibility to change the level of control they have over time. People may need support to manage when services are not working well.

For individuals and families the following questions could be helpful:

- What would support and services look like if I could have more flexibility?
- What are the things I really want to say about?
- What information do I need to assist me to make an informed decision?
- What sort of conversations do I need to have to make sure I am getting the right support?
- How much flexibility do I want in the way services are provided?
- How much awareness and control over the expenditure of individual funding allocations would I like to have?

Service organisations

During the period 2008–2010 significant interest has been generated across the disability sector in the principles, concepts and potential of self-directed service approaches. While a number of service providers are cautious, and rightfully so, about the impact on their organisations of moving towards more personalised /individualised approaches, the underlying merits are often accepted.

Disability sector organisations will be required to review their governance, management and service delivery arrangements.

For service providers, one way of tackling this challenge is to consider a series of questions:

- What would our organisation look like if a significant level of control and decision-making was genuinely exercised by the people who use our services?
- How could we find out what people who use our service really want from us?
- How would our board operate if they were committed to self-directed approaches?
- What sort of conversations would we have between chief executives and people who use services?
- What sort of conversations would we have between service managers and people who use services?
- How much flexibility would we see in service delivery models?
- How much awareness and control over the expenditure of individual funding allocations would individuals have?
- What sort of conversations would we hear between parents (or carers) and therapists?
- What would the satisfaction levels be like for people accessing services?
- How do we support people who find it hard to say what they want?

Disability Services Commission

Based on clear direction from the WA State Government, the Commission has a role and responsibility to promote and facilitate change within the disability services sector. This will increase the overall level of self-directed services available for people with disability, their families and carers. This should be progressed in partnership with all stakeholders including people with disability, their families and carers and disability sector organisations.

Specifically, the Commission's role is to facilitate, support, coordinate and provide resources to promote an increase in the overall level of self-directed services.

Commencing in 2010–2011, the Commission has allocated grants to encourage a range of strategies to support service providers and service users to build self-directed service capacity. In addition, the Commission's new Community and Sector Development directorate will support and promote the development of individualised, self-directed service arrangements.

The Commission will be required to modify its program, funding, accountability and quality management arrangements to increase flexibility and to allow more individualised support arrangements.

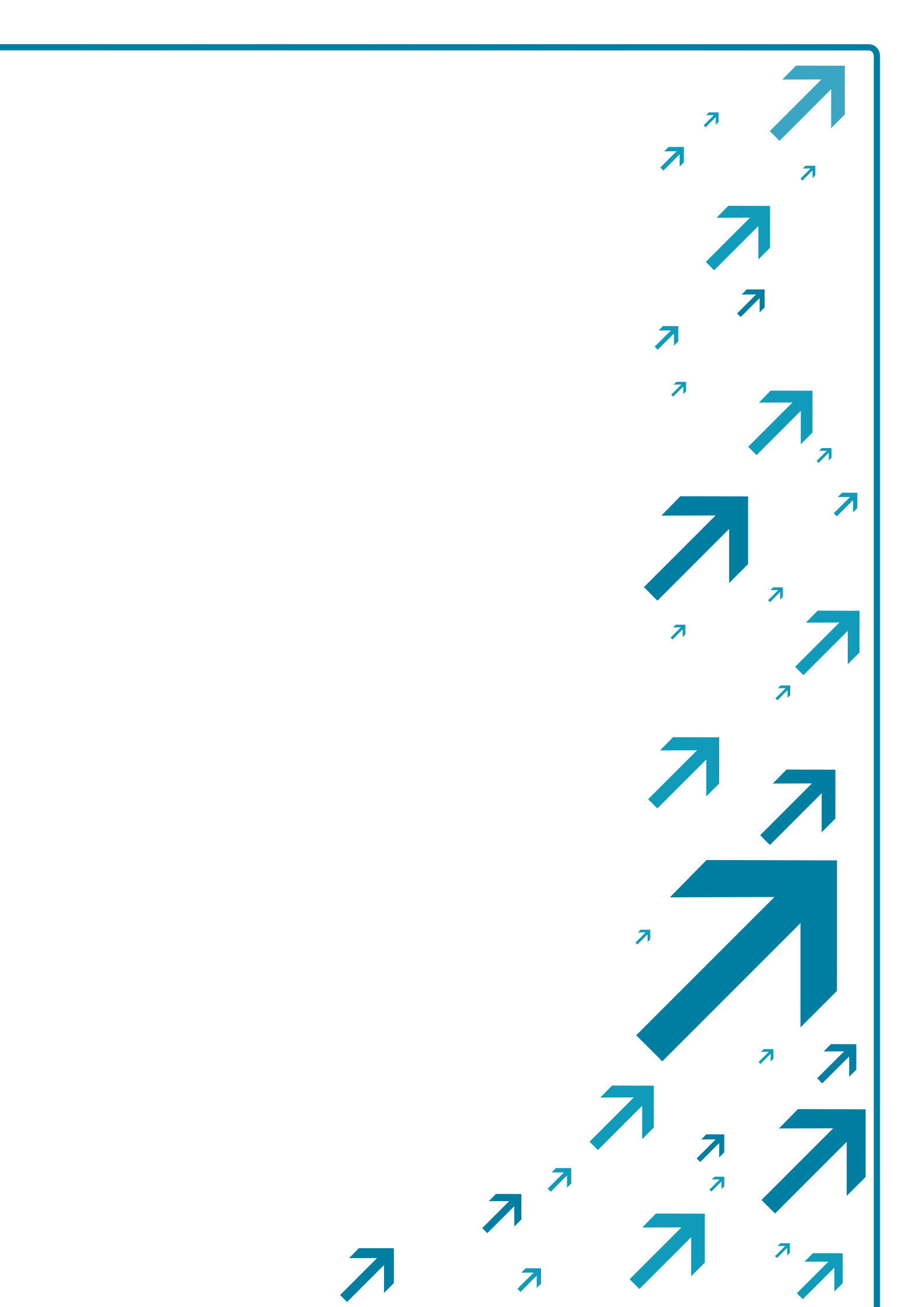
The Commission will also seek the support of key service provider organisations, peak bodies and advocacy organisations in the quest to build self-directed service delivery.

➤ References

- ¹ <http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/Publications/EconomicAuditReport/Pages/SelfDirectedServiceDesign.aspx>
- ² <http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/Publications/EconomicAuditReport/Pages/SelfDirectedServiceDesign.aspx>
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➤ Conclusion

The Economic Audit Committee ([see reference number 2 on page 7](#)) report describes self-directed services as a 'bold change agenda for citizen empowerment'. The report acknowledges work done to date including many examples in disability services. However it suggests 'this capacity for innovation should be built upon and significantly extended'. This paper aims to promote the value of self-directed support and service approaches and encourage people to engage in this 'bold change agenda'.



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