# Choice and control: interpretive analysis of NDIS policy on assistive technology

The ambiguity of choice as a policy principle allows policymakers to avoid or delay specifying how it will be applied in practice, to gain popular support and pre-empt critique. Support is gained by arguing that market competition generates choice for individuals and efficiency for taxpayers, compared to the stereotypical view of bureaucratic and paternalistic public service provision. The Shut Out report illustrated a failure of mainstream and disability services in Australia to deliver equitable access to, and optimal outcomes from AT (National People with Disabilities and Carers Council, 2009). Choice has become a dominant yet imprecise vision to address these failures, but is taken for granted and unchallenged.

The findings from this interpretive research contrast with the political rhetoric of ‘choice and control’ and highlight the risks of devolved policy implementation perpetuating inequalities in access to support. Analysis of AT policy documents produced by the NDIA reveals an interpretation of choice driven by liberal ideals that are not necessarily complementary with the disability rights paradigm, and promotes practices that are inconsistent with the NDIS Act, 2013. Economic imperatives for cost-containment have been adopted as the primary criteria for assessing individual and collective AT procurement decisions, while the persistent problems with the AT workforce capacity and systemic issues of service quality remain unaddressed.