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Early Childhood Assistive Technology Approach

Assistive Technology Suppliers Workshop – Working together

14 December, 2021

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Early Childhood Assistive Technology Approach (ECATA)

Assistive Technology Suppliers/Providers Workshop

Working Together Collaboratively to Improve Outcomes for
Younger Participants

14 December, 2021

[ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au)

- Designing and Early Childhood Assistive Technology Approach (ECATA)
- Background
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Background

The NDIA has a role, as market steward, to create an efficient and sustainable marketplace, of a diverse and competitive range of suppliers who are able to meet the needs of a consumer-driven market that is seeking a more flexible approach to accessing Assistive Technology (AT) supports.

The NDIA shares the community's expectation that we will get this right for participants, their families and carers so that the Scheme remains sustainable and is available to all Australians over the long-term.

Recent consultations with the AT Sector, have made it clear there is an opportunity for market innovation in the adaptable supply of AT, particularly for participants with more rapidly changing needs. Whilst there are a wide range of AT providers, the majority offer a very similar purchase model.



We have five aspirations that are aligned with our purpose and contain specific strategic goals and focus areas



ndis
delivered by the
National Disability
Insurance Agency

Corporate Plan 2021-25

Building a better NDIS

Easy Read version



2. A competitive market with innovative supports

- 2.1 Develop a market with high quality, competitive and innovative supports and services
- 2.2 Improve the NDIS provider experience

Background

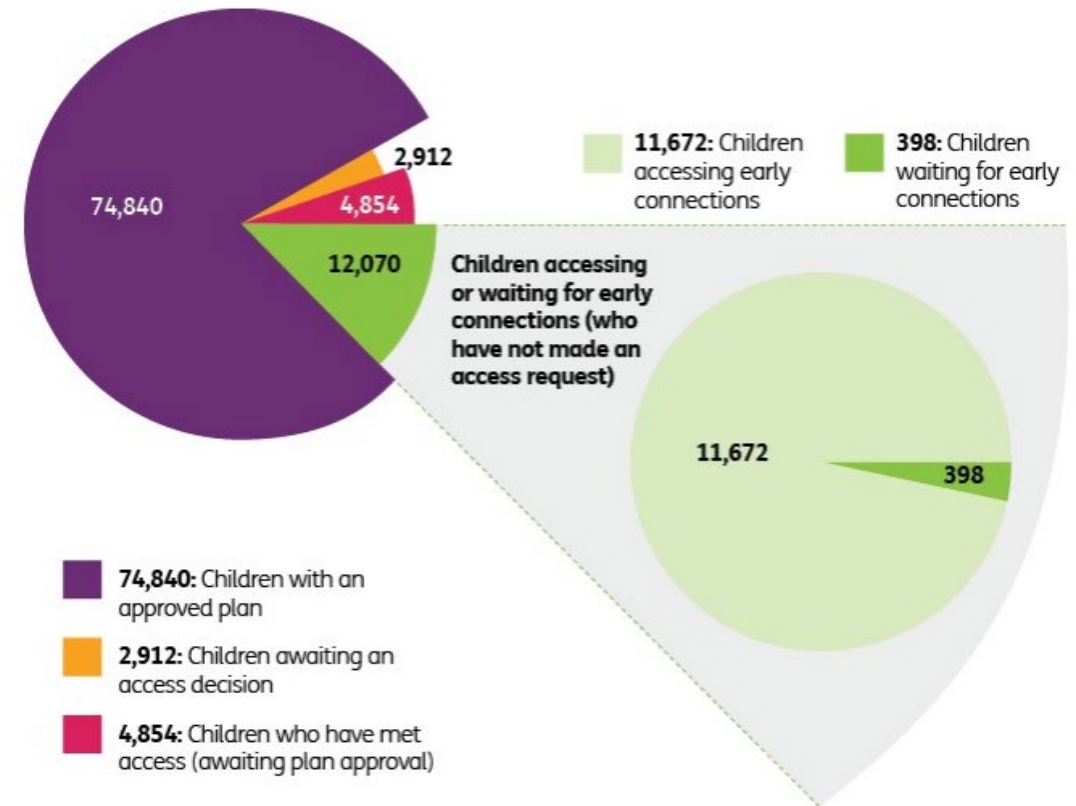


As at **September 2021**, the Scheme was supporting **74,840** children younger than 7, many of whom are receiving assistance for the very first time.

The challenges that participants face in accessing AT during early childhood have been well-documented. We recognise the importance of listening to and understanding participant circumstances, preferences and goals in the planning and provision of AT supports under the NDIS

NDIA will support market development and innovation to ensure the efficient and timely provision of AT for young children.

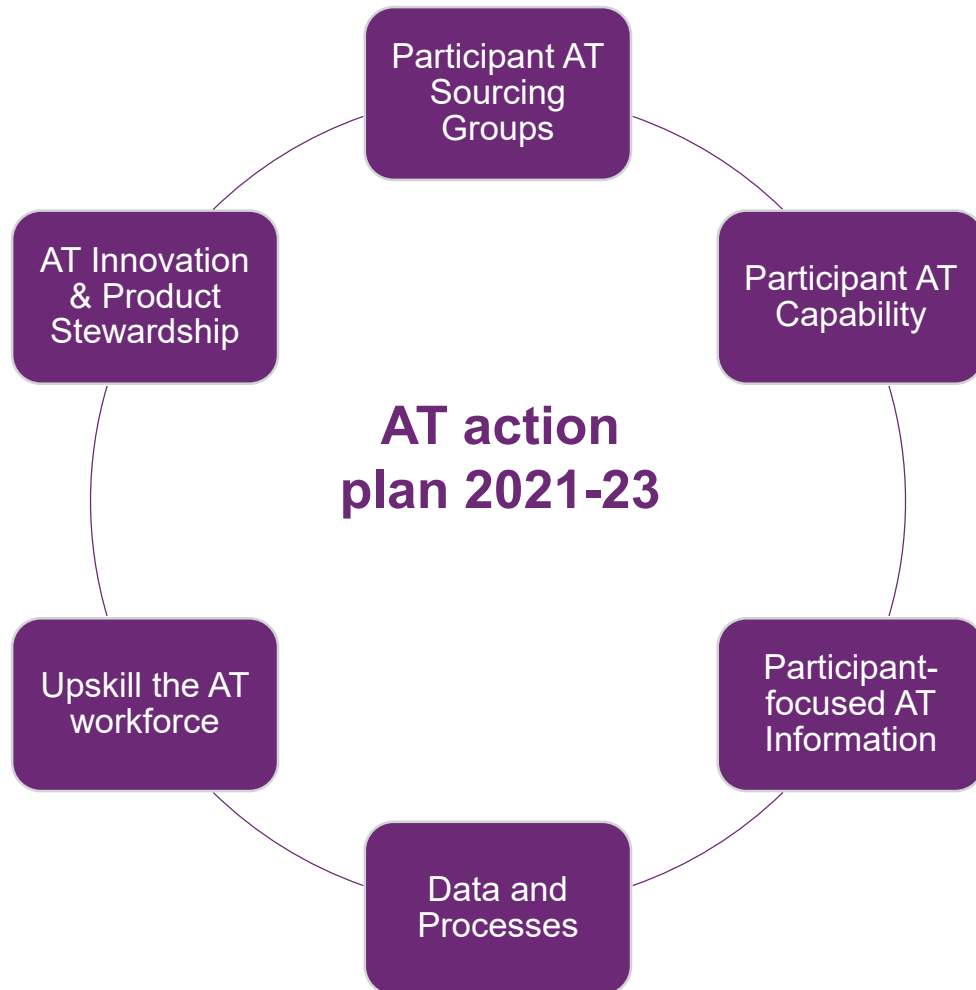
Refurbishment, reuse and recycling components can save money and resources. We want to ensure participants can get the best use from their investment in AT.



Process Improvement



6 key areas we will focus on to achieve our vision



We are working towards a NDIS that is simpler, more consistent, flexible and easier to use. Simplifying NDIS processes and providing participants, their families and carers with more control over their supports and who delivers them.

Our Progress:

- Continence Provider List (published 4 Nov 2021)
- Improving AT options and supply for young participants (ECATA)
- Promoting AT innovation and responsible reuse (ECATA)
- Information sessions – improving community access to reliable AT information
- Planned extension of mid cost AT – adding appropriate budgets with increased flexibility and suitable description of the AT into plans (early 2022)

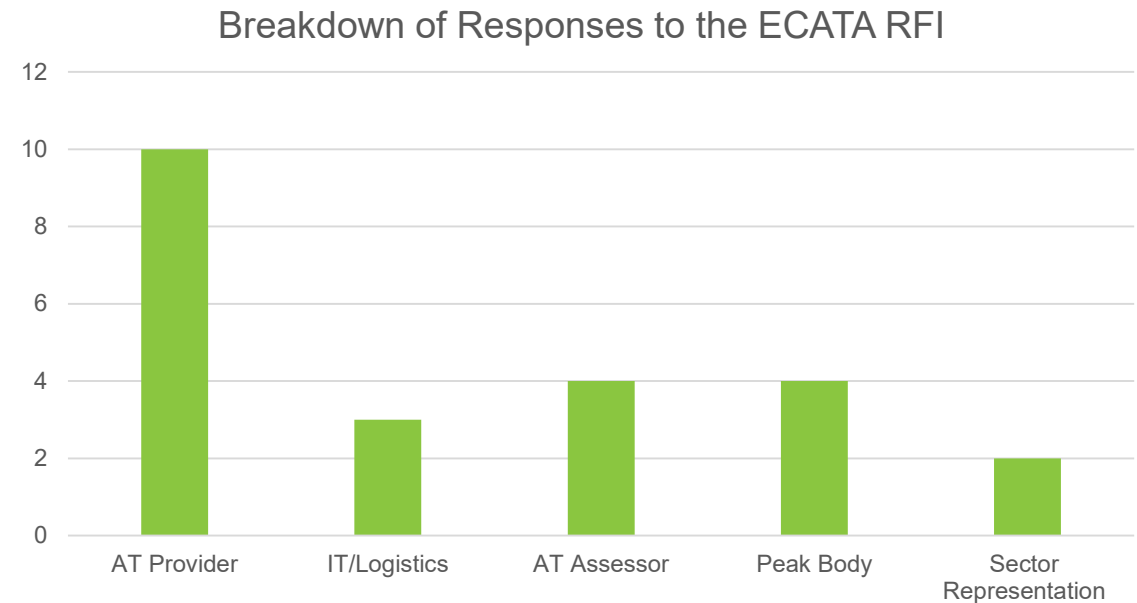
ECATA RFI Outcomes & Overview



On 17 June 2021 NDIA released a Request for Information (RFI) to the AT sector.

The RFI sought market input and advice on existing and future AT market solutions to develop participant-driven sourcing approaches to refine and improve the early childhood AT approach.

The RFI received 23 responses, covering a broad range of views from both existing and new market providers as well as AT assessors / allied health professionals and peak organisations.



ECATA RFI Outcomes & Overview



Overall, the responses to the RFI offered positive solutions to inform the design of a new approach to the provision of AT for children. There was a large interest in collaboration as part of any prospective model, and recommendations to test the market with small scale trials.

Positives

- Significant reductions in supply time.
- Up to date relevant impartial information.
- Transparency in pricing.
- Reduced landfill and waste and improved usage of AT.
- Greater confidence to explore AT options.
- Future innovation opportunities, particularly in bulk procurement and trial of new AT supports.



A number of **challenges and dependencies** were highlighted in responses, some of which were broader than the ECATA focus of the RFI. These included:

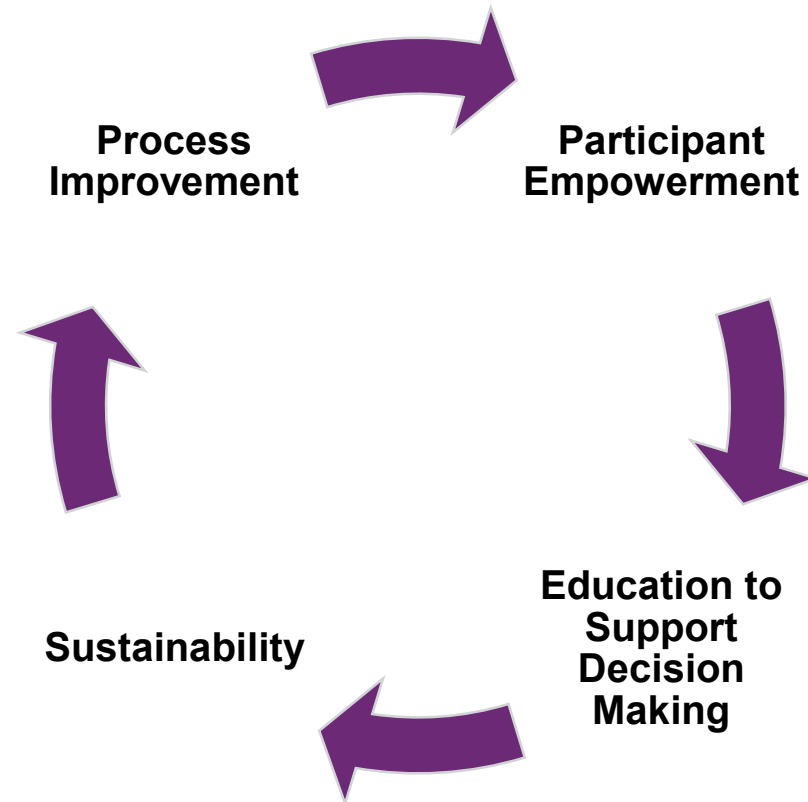
- Costs
- National credentialing framework
- Process Improvement
- Safety and risk liability concerns on reissue AT
- Safeguards

ECATA RFI Outcomes & Overview



Working Together – Priority Action Areas

From the consultation undertaken to this point, including responses to the RFI and stakeholder engagement, four key priority action areas have been identified.



ECATA RFI Outcomes & Overview



- The next stage of the Project has two phases:
- Collaborate with the AT sector through a planned approach via an expression of interest (EOI) request limited to RFI respondents, to trial an AT Loan Pool model.
- Progressively test other EC AT flexible models, including (but not limited to) the use of tele-practice to better support rural and remote participants; an online marketplace to buy and sell second-hand AT, with appropriate safeguards in place; and models that may benefit specific participant cohorts, such as a subscription model for communication devices.
- The trials offer a collaborative approach between NDIA and interested providers to identify better practice and evaluate the effectiveness of more innovative models of delivering flexible AT supports that provide choice and control, are outcomes-focused, reduce touchpoints with the NDIA and help ensure the sustainability of the NDIS.

ECATA Trial Model Options



Phase One – AT Loan Pool

- The NDIA wants participants to be able to routinely trial, rent, exchange and/or purchase AT supports to cost effectively meet their disability related needs, when or before they arise.
- Increasingly participants will be using more flexible plans, and market solutions are required that will enable participant demand for AT within their budgets, that is sustainable for the NDIS.
- Market solutions will need to be more tailored to the different ways a participant may identify, find and access the AT they need, and get the best value from their plans.
- All this while minimising dependency on the NDIA to alter plans or intervene to enable participant requested changes to AT because of expected growth or functional improvements.
- A loan or lending pool for AT was generally well supported through responses to the RFI, with a number of AT providers able to readily expand existing hire systems.

ECATA Trial Model Options



Phase One – Assistive Technology Loan Pool

- Participant benefits of an AT Loan Pool include:
- Immediate access to a broad range of a readily available pool of items that are in stock, affordable, high quality, comfortable, safe and fit-for-purpose for children under 7.
- Loan AT, including specialised AT that may be modified or customised to meet an individual's needs, will maximise budget flexibility so that participants can use their plan budget in a way that best meets their needs.
- Loan rather than purchase of AT that frequently requires replacement due to rapidly changing needs will result in fewer touchpoints with the NDIA and significantly less delay.
- Online accessible information and a service model that puts participants and their families first.
- Experienced staff to assist in the development of AT solutions.
- Trusted AT provider with appropriate safeguards in place.
- Improved guidance and reliable AT information to ensure families are equipped to utilise plans flexibly and navigate the process for accessing appropriate AT supports.
- Reducing AT wastage and environmental impact.

ECATA Trial Model Options

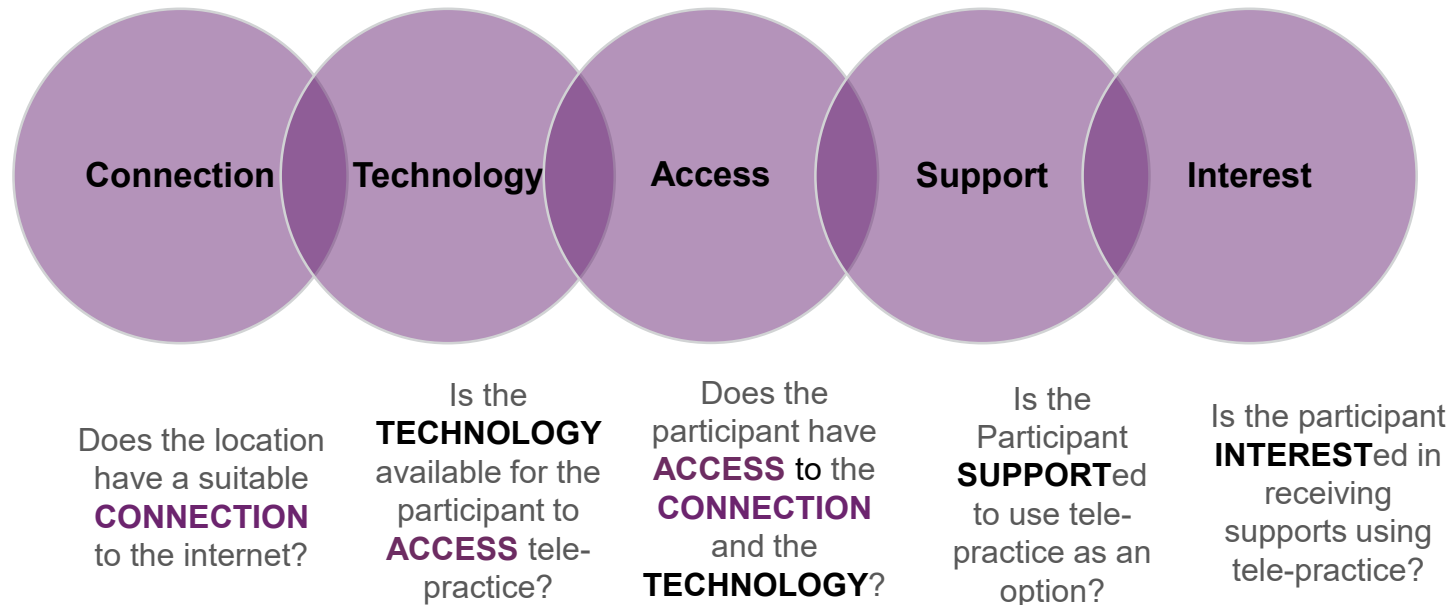


Phase Two – Testing Other ECATA Elements in Trial

What does “good” tele-practice look like?

It's not just about having a tablet and zoom

The five elements to a successful tele-practice:



It is not a one size fits all approach, tele-practice is not intended to replace essential face-to-face assessments or consultations. How can tele-practice be utilised to better support the provision of AT, particularly in rural and remote regions?

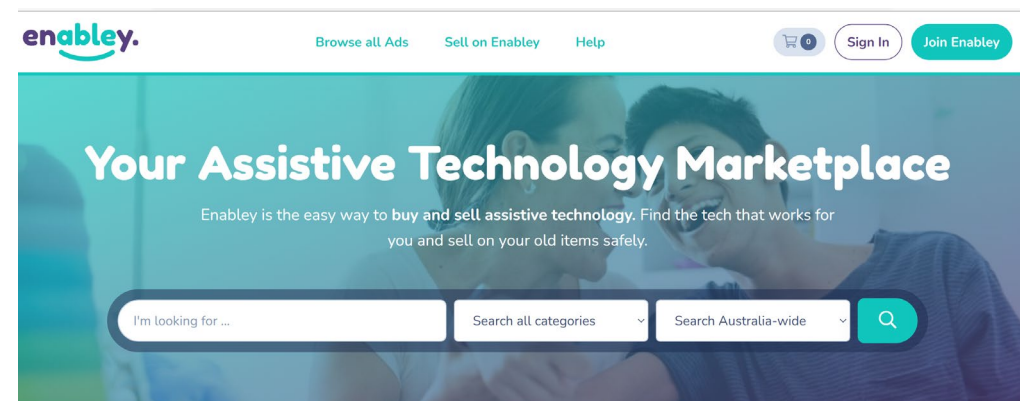
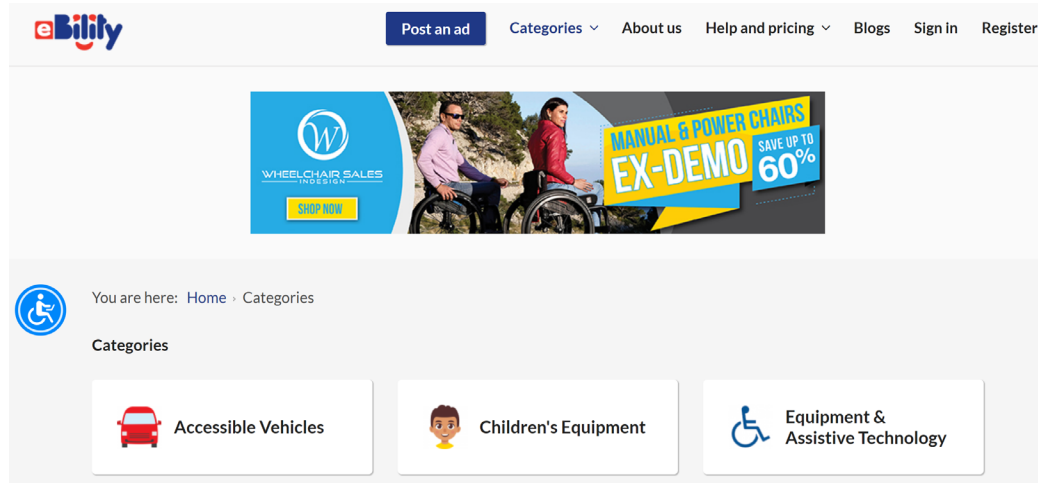
ECATA Trial Model Options

Phase Two – Testing Other ECATA Elements in Trial

In responses to the RFI, an online marketplace was generally viewed as a positive model to simplify the process of recycling and sourcing suitable AT quickly. A number of different online marketplace models were suggested through the RFI.

Feedback from families strongly favoured a 'Marketplace for the 21st Century' which was described as an online platform similar to Gumtree or eBay to buy and sell secondhand AT, with appropriate safeguards in place.

There are a number of existing and emerging online platforms that are currently meeting this need. The NDIA is interested in understanding what the gaps are for families of younger participants in this market, with the potential to trial an online marketplace in 2022.



Next Steps: ECATA Trial



- A collaborative approach to testing will be taken, likely be conducted in defined regions
- It is anticipated that the 2022 trial of an AT loan pool model will:
 - Initially be for a period of 6 months, with the option to extend for a further 6 months;
 - A staged rollout, testing the model in metro, rural and remote regions;
 - Test new elements, including the AT decision matrix and more streamlined processes to enable greater flexibility in funding of AT supports;
 - Reduce Agency touchpoints and allow for timeliness of AT supply;
 - Improve engagement with AT assessors;
 - Improve education material for families highlighting the benefits of the flexible supply of AT through AT loan pools versus outright purchase;
 - Have a much larger take up by participants for greater data and more robust evaluation.
- Through an evaluation framework, we will monitor and review participant and provider experience, to understand that the models tested achieve their intended impacts. If the trial of the AT loan pool is successful, this model will be evaluated for scalability and may be rolled out nationally.

Expression of Interest (Eoi)



- The NDIA will ask suppliers who responded to the RFI to submit and Expression of Interest to work collaboratively with the Agency to complete a trial.
- Only NDIS Registered Providers will be eligible to participate.
- The request for submission will be released, by email, in January 2022 with an expected timeframe of four weeks for submissions to be lodged.
- Submissions to the Eoi will be evaluated against equally weighted selection criteria that encompasses outcomes, scalability, provider capacity and capability and value for money (sustainability, improved outcomes and managed risk).
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be entered into for providers who are selected to work together cooperatively and in collaboration with participants to deliver the ECATA trial(s).
- The Trial is anticipated to commence in March/April 2022.



National Disability Insurance Agency

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