

Introduction to Assistive Technology for Adults

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive Technology, or **AT**, is a device that helps a person with a disability perform everyday tasks. In the Assistive Technology Act of 2004, an AT device is defined as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.” An AT *service* refers to “any service that directly assist an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.”

AT may be simple or high-tech. It might be as basic as a pencil grip, a cane, magnifying glass, or other generally inexpensive, common item. High-tech devices are usually more expensive and might include items like modified computer equipment, a motorized wheelchair, communication devices, or assistive listening devices. AT services include evaluation for AT, adapting a device, training on the use of a devices, and repairing and maintaining the AT.

Who needs assistive technology?

Many people can benefit from AT. If you have problems with communication, mobility or any other daily living task—whether at work, home or in the community—you may want an evaluation to see if AT can help you. Your doctor, physical, occupational or speech therapist, audiologist, or other licensed medical professional can assess your need for AT. Funding sources require this professional assessment and recommendation before paying for assistive technology.

Who pays for the assistive technology?

The funding source will depend on why you need the AT, and on your personal situation and insurance. AT can be funded in a number of different ways.

If you have **Medicare**, some AT may be covered if it is medically necessary and your doctor writes a prescription for the device. A “Letter of Medical Necessity” from the doctor may also be required. Under Medicare Part A, there may be limited coverage. More information is available at <http://tinyurl.com/PartADMAS>. Part B covers “durable medical equipment” like power wheelchairs, orthotics and prosthetic devices. For information on what is covered, see <http://tinyurl.com/PartBDMAS>. The Medicare Helpline 1-800-633-4227 may be able to help you in understanding coverage. It is an automated system; say "Agent" at any time to talk to a customer service representative.

Virginia **Medicaid** covers durable medical equipment: the medically necessary equipment and supplies needed to treat you, as prescribed by your doctor. Questions about Medicaid coverage of AT is generally addressed to the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) Recipient Helpline at (804) 786-6145.

Certain Medicaid programs may pay for additional AT. If you get Medicaid Waiver services under the Individual and Family Developmental Disabilities Support (DD) Waiver, the Intellectual Disability Waiver, or Technology Assisted Waiver, AT may be a covered service. If you are participating in the Money Follows the Person demonstration grant (through June 2016), and have the Elderly or Disabled with Consumer-Direction (EDCD) Waiver, assistive technology may be covered. Fact sheets on each waiver and its point of contact are available at <http://tinyurl.com/waiverfacts>.

Some **private Insurance** policies may pay for AT. They often require both pre-authorization and a Letter of Medical Necessity. Coverage varies; read your policy carefully and talk with your provider before making a purchase.

If you need AT in order to get or keep a job, you may want to contact a vocational rehabilitation services agency. The **Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)**, <http://www.vadars.org/>, can be reached at 1 (800) 552-5019. The **Department for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)**, <http://www.vdbvi.org/>, can assist you if you have vision loss; call 1(800) 622-2155. DBVI can also assist with non-work related AT and AT services to maximize individual safety and independence at home and in the community.

If you have hearing problems, you can contact the **Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)**, <http://www.vddhh.org/>, at (800) 552-7917. VDDHH provides a range of services, including information and training on technical equipment and support services. They also provide workshops on technology and assistive listening devices. **The Technology Assistance Program (TAP)**, <http://www.vddhh.org/tapabout.htm>, provides adaptive telecommunication equipment to qualified applicants whose hearing loss or disabilities prevent them from using a standard telephone.

The **Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS)**, <http://www.vats.org/>, provides information on AT products, funding, and resources through their toll free number, 1(800) 435-8490. VATS also contracts to collect, repair and recycle durable medical equipment, and may provide short-term equipment loans.

The **Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority (ATLFA)**, <http://atlfa.org/>, makes low-interest loans and loan guarantees to people with disabilities for equipment and technology that promote independence, quality of life and employment opportunities. Call 1 (866) 835-5976 for more information.

Your local Community Services Board, local Department of Social Services or private assistive technology providers in your community may also be helpful in getting AT or assistive technology services. They may be aware of local providers and options, including charities, which may assist you.

If you are denied at or AT services, the provider should provide you with the reason for the denial and a statement of your appeal rights.

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