

Assistive Technology Fact Sheet

What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

The term “assistive technology” refers to both devices and services.

An **assistive technology device** is any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. There are many types of AT devices. Mobility devices (including wheelchairs), aids for daily living, and communication aids are a few of the categories. For more examples and a complete listing of AT categories, refer to the list at the end of this document.

An **assistive technology service** is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. Examples include assessments to determine if AT is appropriate, training on how to use an AT device, and maintenance and repairs for an AT device. For more examples, see the list at the end of this document.

I'd like to give AT a try. How do I get started?

The first steps are to recognize the barrier or problem, determine if assistive technology is a good potential solution, and identify the device that will best suit your needs. The following agencies provide assessments and equipment loans for this purpose. The people at these agencies are often able to come up with creative and inexpensive solutions for a wide variety of problems, and most of their services are free of cost. Another option is to contact your nearest Independent Living Center for assistance.

Utah Center for Assistive Technology (UCAT)
1595 W. 500 S.
SLC, UT 84104
801-887-9380
<http://ucat.usor.utah.gov/>

Utah Assistive Technology Program (UATP)
6855 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322
Toll Free: 800-524-5152
www.uatpat.org

Where can I find funding for AT?

Some assistive technology devices can be made (or modified) for you at one of the above agencies for a very low fee, but for others, you will need to identify a funding source. The purpose of the device will determine the funding source. If you have a disability and need the device in order to obtain employment, you will want to contact Vocational Rehabilitation to determine if you are eligible for services. If you are eligible Vocational Rehabilitation can cover the cost. If the device is needed for medical reasons or to enhance your independence you will most likely want to pursue funding through Medicaid, Medicare, or a private insurance company. Independent Living Centers can pay all or part of the costs of an assistive device if it is needed to enhance your independence. Independence can be the ability to simply do more things for yourself in the home. You might have to be placed on a waiting list until funding is available. School districts' Special Education programs are also required to cover the costs of assistive technology when the device is needed for the child to benefit from their special education services. If these are not options for you, there are various other loan programs and resources that can help you obtain funding for AT. Contact one of the agencies listed above or call the Disability Law Center at 1-800-662-9080 for help exploring these options.

What will each of these funding sources cover? What do I need to know before I apply?

As mentioned above, funding sources of AT include Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, Independent Living, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Special Education. Before requesting AT from any of these sources, you will need to consider whether the item you are requesting is “necessary” according to the program’s standards, and you will need to get an idea of whether the item is a covered benefit. Consider the following information about each of these programs.

Medicaid

The Utah Medicaid Program defines a service as medically necessary for adults if it is reasonable calculated to prevent, diagnose or cure conditions in the patient that endangers life, cause suffering or pain, physical deformity, or malfunctions or threatens to cause a handicap; and there is no equally effective course of treatment available for the recipient which is more conservative or less costly. For children the medical service or device must correct or ameliorate defects and physical and mental illnesses and conditions and, again, there is no other equally effective course of treatment available or suitable for the recipient requesting the service that is more conservative or substantially less costly.

Medicaid will (typically) cover Durable Medical Equipment (DME) or Prosthetic Devices. In the past there have been questions about whether all will be covered for adults, but this has been fixed, and they all can be available for adults.

DME is defined by the Utah Medicaid program as:

- Withstanding repeated use

- Primarily and customarily used to serve a medical purpose
- Appropriate for use in the home
- Not useful to the person in absence of an illness or injury

Prosthetic Devices are defined as replacement, corrective or supportive devices prescribed by a physician or other licensed practitioner of the healing arts within the scope of his/her practice as defined by state law to:

- Artificially replace a missing portion of the body
- Prevent or correct physical deformity or malfunction (including promotion of adaptive functioning), or
- Support a weak or deformed portion of the body.

Medicare

Expenses incurred by a beneficiary for the rental or purchases of Durable Medical Equipment (DME) are reimbursable if the following three requirements are met:

- The equipment meets Medicare's definition of DME
- The equipment is necessary and reasonable for the treatment of the patient's illness or injury or to improve the functioning of his or her malformed body member and
- The equipment is used in the patient's home.

DME is equipment which:

- Can withstand repeated use
- Is primarily and customarily used to serve a medical purpose
- Generally is not useful to a person in absence of an illness or injury; and
- Is appropriate for use in the home

Medicare will cover approximately 80% of the cost of the equipment. If you have both Medicare and Medicaid, Medicaid will pay for what Medicare won't.

Independent Living Centers

Independent Living defines AT as devices and services to help people with disabilities increase their independence. Independent Living Centers provide the following supports and services:

- AT coordinator that can assist with determining types and costs of AT
- AT loan banks
- Help pursuing funding
- Can purchase AT (when appropriate)

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

To receive services, an individual must be disabled and require services to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment that is consistent with the individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. VR services which may meet the definition of AT include:

- Prosthetic and orthotic devices
- Eyeglasses

- Orientation and mobility services
- Vehicular modification
- Telecommunications
- Sensory devices
- Other technological aids and devices

Special Education

The regulations require that AT devices and services are made available to any student with a disability “if required.” A student’s need for AT must be determined on a case-by-case basis. The basic standard to be met is whether or not the student needs the AT to benefit from their special education services.

Section 504 states that, “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by the U.S. government.”

This means that students may be eligible to receive AT even if they do not need any special education services. A student would be eligible if the only services received were modifications in the regular education program.

What if the requested AT device or service has been denied?

Keep the following tips in mind if you are denied for an AT device:

- Get the denial in writing.
- Check for appeal deadlines.
- Contact the individuals that helped with the assessment to see if they will help.
- Keep copies of all relevant records
- Contact the Disability Law Center

How can the Disability Law Center help?

The Disability Law Center may be able to help by explaining your rights, advocating for you to get the AT you need, providing information and referrals, and representing you in a legal hearing if you are denied AT. Call the Short Term Assistance Team at 801-363-1347 or 1-800-662-9080 or visit us online at www.disabilitylawcenter.org for more information.

An assistive technology device can fall into any of the categories listed below:

Aids for daily living (self-help aids) are used in activities such as eating, bathing, cooking, dressing, toileting, and home maintenance.

Ambulation aids help people walk upright, such as canes, walkers and crutches.

Architectural items are structural adaptations to the home or worksite that remove or reduce physical barriers. These adaptations include ramps, elevators, lowered computer stands, levers (instead of door knobs) and lowered countertops.

Bed aids make bedroom functioning easier, including manual and electric beds, side rails and transfer equipment.

Communication aids are for people with communication impairments. They include augmentative communication devices and manual and electronic communication boards.

Educational aids enable people with disabilities to carry out school or work related activities. Computers, adaptive software and modified computer input devices are examples of these aids.

Environmental controls are primarily electronic switches or systems that enable people without mobility to control appliances, electronic aids, lights, telephones, and security systems, in a room, home or other surroundings.

Mobility aids allow freer movements, including transfer aids and patient lifts as well as all types of wheelchairs and three wheeled vehicles.

Prosthetics and orthotics These devices which include braces and artificial limbs replace or augment missing or non-functioning body parts.

Recreational aids These devices include adaptations to sports or other equipment that enable people with functional limitations to participate in recreational activities.

Seating and positional aids These are modifications to wheelchairs, scooters or other seating systems that provide the body stability, upright posture or the reduction of pressure on the skin surface. The equipment includes wheelchair cushions, modular seating and seat lifts.

Sensory aids These devices are for people with visual or hearing disabilities. Devices include hearing aids, FM Loop Systems, low-vision aids, reading devices and telecommunication devices for the deaf.

Transportation aids These devices enable independence in personal transportation, such as car-top carriers for cars and vans, child restraint seats and modifications to ensure vehicle access.

Examples of assistive technology services include:

Evaluation of the needs of an individual with a disability, including a functional evaluation of the individual in their customary environment

Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by individuals with disabilities

Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing of assistive technology devices

Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs

Training or technical assistance for an individual with disabilities, or where appropriate, the family of an individual with disabilities, and

Training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education and rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of individuals with disabilities.