

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: AN OVERVIEW

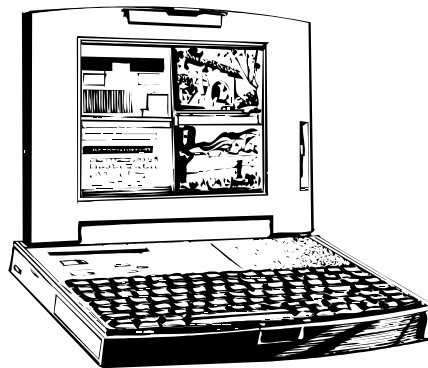


Figure 1: Laptop computer.

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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: AN OVERVIEW

I. INTRODUCTION

Assistive technology is a device or service that a person with a disability uses to function in his or her daily life. Assistive technology can be found in the home, workplace, school, institution, and community. Assistive technology helps a person with a disability to become or remain independent. This brochure describes assistive technology and provides general information on funding.

IMPORTANT: This publication is for general informational purposes only. This publication is not intended, nor should be construed, to create an attorney-client relationship between the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN) and any person. Nothing in this publication should be considered to be legal advice.

PLEASE NOTE: For information in alternative formats or a language other than English, contact DRN at 800-692-7443 Ext. 400, TDD: 877-375-7139, or drnpa-hbg@drnpa.org.

II. WHAT IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY?

The Assistive Technology Act of 2004 defines an assistive technology device 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.” Assistive technology devices can be “low tech” or “high tech.” Assistive technology devices include:

- power and manual wheelchairs, scooters, canes, walkers, and standing devices.
- augmentative communication devices (speech generating devices), voice amplifiers, and speech recognition devices.
- other durable medical equipment and medical supplies, such as patient lifts and incontinence supplies.
- other orthotics and prosthetics, such as hearing aids and electric larynxes.
- accessibility adaptations to the home, workplace, schools, group homes, nursing facilities, ICF/MRs, and other places. These include ramps, stair glides, lifts, grab bars, flashing smoke detectors, lever doorknobs, and environmental controls.
- special equipment to help people work, study, and engage in recreation, such as enlarged computer keyboards, reachers, amplified telephones, magnifiers, voice recognition software, and adaptive sports equipment.
- accessibility modifications in the community, such as audio systems on public transportation, talking ATMs, and voting machines for the blind.

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.”

Assistive technology services include:

- an evaluation of the assistive technology needs of an individual, including a functional evaluation of how assistive technology would help the individual.
- purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing an assistive technology device.

- selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, replacing, or donating an assistive technology device.
- coordinating and using therapies, such as occupational therapy or physical therapy, with assistive technology devices under an educational plan or rehabilitative plan.
- training or technical assistance for an individual with a disability, or his or her family members, guardians, advocates, or authorized representatives.
- training or technical assistance for educational or rehabilitation professionals, manufacturers of assistive technology devices, employers, providers of training and employment services, and others who help individuals with disabilities.
- a service that expands access to technology, including email and Internet, to persons with disabilities.

III. HOW CAN I GET ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY?

In Pennsylvania, several programs may pay for assistive technology. Major sources of government funding are described below. For comprehensive information on funding sources, please review the Disability Rights Network's brochure entitled "Assistive Technology: How to Pay for the Device or Service That You Need."

A. Medical Assistance (Medicaid)

Medical Assistance is government-funded health insurance for eligible children and adults, including many persons with disabilities. Medical Assistance is provided by managed care health plans or is fee for service (ACCESS or ACCESS Plus). You can apply for Medical Assistance through your local County Assistance Office.

There are several ways to qualify for Medical Assistance in Pennsylvania. Depending on your level of eligibility, the types of assistive technology that may be funded include:

- medical supplies, including durable medical equipment (DME), prostheses, orthoses, appliances, and surgical supplies.
- medical supplies, equipment, and appliances through home health care services.
- medical supplies through Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Testing (EPSDT) for children under age 21, including eyeglasses and hearing aids.
- medical supplies through the School Medical Program.

If Medical Assistance pays for you to be in a nursing facility or ICF/MR, the facility must provide you necessary assistive technology devices and services.

For Medical Assistance to pay for assistive technology, a doctor's prescription is needed, and the item must be medically necessary.

You have appeal rights if you disagree with a Medical Assistance decision regarding assistive technology. There is a deadline to request an appeal. You may wish to contact an attorney or advocate as soon as you are notified of a denial.

B. Medicaid Home and Community Based Waivers

Pennsylvania has several Home and Community Based Waivers that help persons with disabilities to live in the community rather than in institutions, such as nursing facilities or ICF/MRs. Assistive technology may be funded through the following Waivers:

- Aging Waiver for a person age 60 or older.
- Autism Waiver for an adult with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- COMMCARE Waiver for an adult with traumatic brain injury.
- Consolidated Waiver for a person with an intellectual disability age 3 or older.
- Independence Waiver for an adult with a physical disability.
- Michael Dallas Model Waiver for a person who is technology dependent.
- OBRA Waiver for an adult with a developmental disability.
- Person/Family Directed Support Waiver for a person with an intellectual disability age 3 or older.

These Waivers may pay for assistive technology, including assistive technology/specialized medical equipment, home adaptations, and vehicle adaptations. Every Waiver does not pay for every type of assistive technology. Please contact your Supports Coordinator or Department of Public Welfare for more information. For information on applying for a Waiver, please contact the Department of Public Welfare at 717-783-4510 (voice). The website for the Department of Public Welfare is www.dpw.state.pa.us/.

You have appeal rights if you disagree with a decision regarding your eligibility for a Waiver or assistive technology under a Waiver. There is a deadline to request an appeal. You may wish to contact an attorney or advocate as soon as you are notified of a denial.

C. Medicare

Medicare is government-funded health insurance for persons aged 65 and older; persons with End Stage Renal Disease; and persons who, for 24 months, have received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Railroad Retirement payments based on a disability (there is no waiting period for a person with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis).

You may receive original Medicare or may be enrolled in a Medicare Advantage HMO.

A Medicare Advantage HMO requires prior approval for assistive technology. Assistive technology can be funded through Medicare Part A and Part B as durable medical equipment, prosthetic devices, and orthotic devices. Medicare Part B pays for power wheelchairs and augmentative communication devices.

You have appeal rights if you disagree with a Medicare decision regarding assistive technology. There is a deadline to request an appeal. Review carefully any notices regarding your Medicare. You may wish to contact an attorney or advocate as soon as you are notified of a denial.

D. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) helps persons with disabilities prepare for, start, and maintain employment. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation can arrange for an evaluation of your needs for assistive technology. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation can also help you obtain assistive technology devices and services.

You have appeal rights if you disagree with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's decision regarding assistive technology. There are deadlines to file an appeal. You may wish to contact an attorney or advocate as soon as you are notified of a denial. For help with your appeal, please contact the Client Assistance Program at 215-557-7112 (voice/TDD) or 888-745-2357 (toll free). The website for the Client Assistance Program is: www.equalemployment.org/.

E. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, or IDEA 2004, requires the school district or intermediate unit to provide special education and related services to a child with a disability. A child with a disability may receive assistive technology devices or services, including an evaluation and training, as a part of his or her Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

A student with a disability may also receive accommodations and services, including assistive technology devices and services, under Chapter 15 of the Pennsylvania regulations and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

You have appeal rights if you disagree with the school district or intermediate unit's decision regarding assistive technology. There is a deadline to request an appeal. You may wish to contact an attorney or advocate as soon as you are notified of a denial.

Remember, for comprehensive information regarding paying for Assistive Technology, please review the Disability Rights Network's brochure entitled "Assistive Technology: How to Pay for the Device or Service That You Need."

IV. WHO SHOULD I CONTACT FOR HELP?

If you need more information or need help, please contact the intake unit of the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN) at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TDD). Our email address is: intake@drnpa.org.

The mission of the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN) is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Due to our limited resources, DRN cannot provide individual services to every person with advocacy and legal issues. DRN prioritizes cases that have the potential to result in widespread, systemic changes to benefit persons with disabilities. While we cannot provide assistance to everyone, we do seek to provide every individual with information and referral options.

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