

## **Introduction to Assistive Technology for Children**

### **What Is Assistive Technology?**

Assistive Technology, or AT, refers to any item, piece of equipment, or product system used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. AT can be obtained commercially “off the shelf” or it can be modified or customized.

An “assistive technology service” refers to any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

### **Types of Assistive Technology:**

There are two types of Assistive Technology: Low-tech and High-tech. Low-tech Devices might include pencil grips, canes, a standard computer mouse, or other generally inexpensive and commonly found items. High-tech devices are usually more expensive and might include such items as modified electronic or computer equipment, motorized wheelchairs, augmentation and alternative communication devices, environmental controls, assistive listening devices, and voice activation programs.

### **Who Needs Assistive Technology?**

Many children with disabilities can greatly benefit from AT, including those with physical, visual, cognitive and hearing impairments. If the child has issues with communication, mobility or any other daily living task at school, home or in the community, they should be evaluated to determine if an AT device might be helpful. Medical professionals such as physical, occupational, or speech therapists and pediatricians are able to assess your child’s need for AT. You will need this medical professional to justify the need for the AT via a letter of medical necessity if purchased through insurance or Medicaid.

## **Who Pays For The Assistive Technology?**

AT can be funded in several ways:

- If a child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Assistive Technology Act are federal laws that may require the school to provide AT.
- If a child is participating in the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Medicaid program, EPSDT may be able to fund the AT. The device must simply “correct, ameliorate, or maintain (the) disability.” EPSDT covers children from birth through age 21. For questions about Medicaid benefits and AT, contact the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) at 800-421-7376 or at [dmasinfo@dmas.virginia.gov](mailto:dmasinfo@dmas.virginia.gov).
- Individuals receiving Medicaid Waiver services through Developmental Disabilities (DD) Waiver or the Intellectual Disabilities/Mental Retardation (ID/MR) Waiver may be able to get funding for AT. Each of these Waivers can fund up to \$5,000 annually toward AT services. For questions about the DD Waiver, contact the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) at 804-786-1465. For questions about the ID / MR Waiver, contact the Department for Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) at 804-786-0580.
- Individuals receiving services through the Money Follows the Person (“MFP”) Demonstration project may also be eligible for AT funding under the Elderly or Disabled with Consumer Direction (EDCD) Medicaid Waiver or HIV/AIDS (AIDS) Medicaid Waiver. For more information about the MFP project visit [www.olmsteadva.com/mfp](http://www.olmsteadva.com/mfp) or call the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) at 804-786-7933.
- The Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) is a statewide program that assists individuals to locate and acquire AT devices. VATS has linked up with numerous vendors around the state to form “recycling programs.” These programs sanitize, repair, refurbish, and redistribute used AT devices at no cost. VATS recycling vendors have a broad range of devices that are both high and low tech. VATS can be reached at 800-435-8490.
- The New Well Fund is a low interest loan program that assists Virginians with disabilities to get the assistive technology they need. They also provide loans for individuals working from

home who need equipment for their home business. To contact the New Well Fund, call 866-835-5976 or visit [www.atlfa.org/contactus.htm](http://www.atlfa.org/contactus.htm).

- Private insurance policies often provide some coverage for medically necessary AT. This is not true of all policies, so review your insurance policy benefits carefully with your provider
- Your local Community Services Board, charity organizations, or existing private AT providers in your community may be helpful resources to help acquire AT. You can locate your local Community Services Board by visiting <http://www.dmhmrzas.virginia.gov/SVC-CSBs.asp>.

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