

How Can Assistive Technology Reduce My Need for Personal Assistance Services?

Assistive technology (AT) has been defined as "any item or piece of equipment, whether acquired commercially, modified or customized, that is used to maintain, increase or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities..." (Assistive Technology Act of 1998).

Assistive technology can help with

- **Mobility** – A huge variety of wheelchairs, scooters, and other mobility devices make it possible for people with disabilities to maneuver independently. Sophisticated controls allow many people with limited physical function to operate a wheelchair. Van lifts, automatic tiedowns, and hand controls offer some people the independence of driving.
- **Communication** – For many years, TTYs have given people in the Deaf community access to phone communication. Recently, e-mail and text messaging have become commonplace, and technology now allows people with physical disabilities to answer, dial, and hang up the phone by pressing a switch or through voice activation. These advances not only benefit people who have a hearing impairment or who are Deaf, but also people with other disabilities whose speech may be difficult to understand. Alternative Communication devices are becoming more portable and can even be integrated into small computers or handheld devices.
- **Operating a computer** – Computers can be accessed by speaking, touching the screen, pressing a switch as a computer scans available choices, or listening as the computer reads what is on the screen out loud. Many types of hardware, such as different types of keyboards and mice, and software offer numerous possibilities, even for people with complex or multiple disabilities.
- **Eating** – Adaptive splints, plates, bowls, silverware and cups may make it possible for people with restricted movement or strength to eat independently. Some devices have even been developed that will spoon food from a plate to the person's mouth by pushing a lever.
- **Using the bathroom** – Some people can maneuver independently in the bathroom with the help of adapted clothing (snaps, Velcro, or pull-loops). There is also a device that allows an individual wearing a catheter to empty a leg bag by simply pushing a button.
- *and more!*

In seeking to be more independent at home or at work, it makes sense to explore assistive technology options.

Cost

People are often concerned about the costs of assistive technology. In reality, prices can range from almost free to very expensive depending on the device.

In Connecticut, a good place to start is with the CT Tech Act Project (CTTAP). CTTAP works to increase independence and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities through increased access to assistive technology for work, school and community living. The project helps individuals of all ages and all disabilities, as well as family members, employers, educators and other professionals to have access to assistive technology devices and services.

- **GetATstuff** is a website for recycling AT equipment, where you can find new and used devices for sale or for free. You can also post AT devices that you no longer need or use. GetATstuff was developed in collaboration with the AT Tech Act Programs throughout New England and can be found at www.getATstuff.com.
- **The Assistive Technology Loan Program** assists Connecticut citizens with disabilities and older adults to pay for the assistive technology devices and services they need. Loans can be made to an individual with a disability / older adult, parent, guardian, family member or legal representative of the person with the disability.

Loans are flexible, ranging from \$500 to \$30,000, to be repaid over 1 to 10 years depending on the circumstances and the amount of the loan. Funding can be used for a broad range of assistive technology devices and services.

The CT Tech Act Project operates out of the Connecticut Department of Social Services, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

<http://www.ct.gov/brs/site/default.asp>

- Visit one of CTTAP's AT Demonstration Centers or participate in an AT device loan to help determine if an AT device is right for you.

For information, contact:

CT Tech Act Project
860-424-4881 (voice)
860-424-4839 (TTY)
800-537-2549 (Toll-Free In state)
www.cttechact.com

Assessment and Training

Key to a successful assistive technology outcome is a good assessment and the appropriate training. You can ask for a rehabilitation engineer through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) or the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB).

Once an AT device has been determined to be appropriate for you, getting the training you need to learn how to use the device effectively is just as important. If you are not working with BRS or BESB, the staff at the CT Tech Act Project can connect you to other resources throughout the state to help you obtain an appropriate assessment and/or training.

Assistive technology may not be able to eliminate your need for personal assistance services, but it can make you more independent and sometimes allow you to reduce your support hours.