

Assistive Technology

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Assistive Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, or system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of an individual with a disability. Assistive technology can be made at home, purchased in a local store or purchased from a retailer specializing in AT. AT includes “low tech” items like ramps, communication boards, car door openers, and Velcro, as well as “high tech” items like computers, software, electronic communication devices, and power wheelchairs.

Does my Child Need AT?

Because AT encompasses so many types of equipment and devices, the processes by which families and professionals determine what a child might need or benefit from can vary. Families will want to partner with the professionals who serve their children when considering AT. Some items, such as wheelchairs and braces, require an order from a physician. Other systems may be best selected after an evaluation process and an opportunity to “try out” options. Families can benefit from considering the following as they evaluate their child’s need and research the equipment being considered:

- Find out all you can about it.
- Contact families that have used similar items and find out what they think about it.
- Ask what kind of warranty comes with the product.
- Find out if repair service is local or requires that the item be sent away.
- Consider the possibility of low tech devices that can achieve the same results.

How is AT Funded and Provided?

Public and Private Health Insurance

Some types of AT are covered under some private and public insurance programs. Families should carefully review coverage information and requirements for authorization and demonstration of medical necessity. Your employer, human resources or benefits department, case manager, care coordinator, or plan administrator are key sources for this type of information.

Several public programs provide potential funding for AT needs. To access these a child must first qualify for and be enrolled in the program and then must meet and follow guidelines for AT funding.

First Steps Early Intervention

Limited assistive technology may be available to Indiana children aged birth to three who qualify for early intervention services through the First Steps program. Assistive devices may include a variety of items, equipment, materials, or services (including adaptation to toys, learning materials, current equipment, or the child’s environment) that permit the child to be more successful in their play and development. A team working with the child and family will evaluate the child’s needs to determine what types of AT, if any, should be a part of a child’s Individual Family Service Plan.

Public Schools

Students ages 3-22 who are receiving special education services may have assistive technology devices and related services provided by the school. Decisions about what type of assistive technology devices and services are provided and if those devices will also be used by the student outside of school are made by the student’s Case Conference Committee. Access to devices must be required to ensure a student can receive a free appropriate public education before a committee will consider funding. Similarly, students with disabilities served under Section 504 may receive AT as part of their “reasonable accommodations.”

Grants and Other Funding Opportunities

A list of possible grant resources for assistive technology can be found on the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community website: <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/grant-funding-opportunities>

Where to Learn More:

Indiana has several programs that can connect families to information about assistive technology, access to evaluations, lending programs that allow individuals to try technology before committing to purchasing, referrals and trainings. Families are encouraged to contact these organizations as they gather information to meet their child's needs.

Easter Seals Crossroads INDATA Project

The INDATA Project at Easter Seals Crossroads provides information and access to assistive technology, at no charge, for Hoosiers with disabilities. These statewide services are derived through the Indiana Assistive Technology Act (INDATA) state/federal grant and include device demonstrations, device loans, recycled computers, reutilized assistive technology equipment, alternative financing resources and educational trainings and conferences.

Phone: (317) 466-1000 **Website:** www.eastersealstech.com

Explore AAC

The Explore AAC website provides assistive technology resources to families of children with disabilities. Explore new communication solutions, browse the term glossary, and view informational videos. The website also offers interactive learning modules and resources.

**Note: This website is funded by PRC-Salttillo, a provider of AAC devices.*

Website: <https://exploreaac.com/>

PATINS (Promoting Achievement through Technology and INstruction for all Students)

The PATINS Project is an Indiana Department of Education/Center for Exceptional Learners assistive technology systems change initiative designed to impact both the organizational capacities of local public schools and the professional capabilities of school staff in the delivery of assistive technology services, as well as the implementation of Universal Design for Learning Principles. Equipment, software, videos, and print materials are available to public school staff for preview and evaluation purposes. In addition, PATINS offers workshops, both onsite and offsite, and offers technical assistance to local school personnel on specific devices. Families can partner with their schools to bring PATINS resources and assistance to students.

Website: <https://www.patinsproject.org/>

Step Up AT

The Step Up AT program supports teachers and parents in effectively using evidence-based assistive technology. They have a wide variety of parent/caregiver resource guides available on their website, most available in both English and Spanish.

Website: <https://www.stepupat.org/>

Programs and systems change often. It is important to ensure that you are using the most current information. This fact sheet was updated July 2023. Please check <https://www.inf2f.org/fact-sheets.html> for the most recent edition.

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