

AT Legislation on the Move

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

The IPAT Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) is initiating two bills to be considered by the 1997 ND Legislature with regard to assistive technology. These bills have the potential to impact individuals with disabilities of all ages. One bill is in regard to the definition of assistive technology and the other relates to assistive technology device warranties (lemon law).

The definition of assistive technology as contained in the Tech Act has been adopted by IDEA (Special Education) and the Rehabilitation Act. Incorporation of the definition of "assistive technology" into state law could serve to furnish a uniform understanding throughout the state of North Dakota as to what is meant by the terminology "assistive technology" between various disciplines and service entities. Consistency of this definition could help in minimizing any confusion or disagreement, thereby providing a working vocabulary resulting in increased efficiency in administration of services.

The "assistive technology lemon law" would provide consumer protection against inherently defective products. Assistive technology products are often available through limited sources rather than through the mainstream retail outlets, that by their very nature, provide consumer protection through competition and consumer choice. The breakdown of equipment for people using assistive technology devices often results in their inability to communicate, be mobile, go to work, and/or live independently.

Enclosed in this issue of the *AT Key* is an equipment warranty survey. Please take a few minutes to complete and return it. Your information is important and will be very helpful in the endeavor to pass this legislation impacting consumers throughout our state.

AT Outreach Services

The Anne Carlsen Center (ACC), through a grant with IPAT, provided outreach services for assistive technology on the four Native American Reservations in North Dakota last year. They identified specific AT needs on each reservation, developed training based on those needs, and sent a teach to provide the identified training at each site. The response to this outreach training was very positive.

ACC and IPAT have entered into another contract this year to provide assistive technology services to parents and service providers supporting individuals with disabilities in very rural areas and on Native American Reservations. Staff from

the Anne Carlsen Center will develop training based on identified AT needs and expand upon the training done in the previous year.

Reach Out via AT Kits

Wouldn't it be great to have opportunities within our own homes and rural communities for hands-on experience with adaptive devices that increase independence? Well, that opportunity is now available! Twenty assistive technology training and awareness kits have been designed by IPAT to enable consumers, active seniors, care providers and others an opportunity to provide training and to demonstrate a variety of low-tech devices within their own communities.

The kits have two distinct designs. One focuses on assistive technology for infants and small children, and the other addresses the needs of individuals experiencing the effects of aging. Each kit contains low tech devices such as door levers, recreational aids, button hooks, and adaptive eating utensils.

IPAT staff are available to provide initial training and demonstration of the kits to consumers, support groups, family members, public health nurses, outreach coordinators and others in rural communities and on the Native American Reservations. Volunteers are then recruited on-site to continue demonstrating and circulating the kits. This is done through a free, time-limited loan of the respective kit from the IPAT project.

To date, volunteer trainers have shared these kits with people in their own homes, at parent support group meetings, health and disability fairs, county and state fair exhibits, Senior Citizens' Centers, nursing homes and day care facilities. If you are interested in reaching out via the AT Kits, contact the IPAT coordinator nearest you.

IPAT Staff

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Consumer Connection

My name is Emil Gunsch. I am 72 years old and have been blind more than twenty years. I have made an adaption to my feeler cane that may be of interest. I've added a set of small rubber wheels to the end of the cane-tip. I believe this addition greatly approves its effectiveness.

I was never satisfied with the tapping procedure that is used with the feeler canes. The cane gets stuck ... or you miss something important between taps.

So, I bought some rubber faucet washers and made a metal frame to attach them to the end of the cane as a wheel. I made the wheel so you can easily attach or remove it by simply unscrewing the typical nylon cane-tip and screwing on the wheel.

I find that by rolling this wheel ahead of me as I walk, I know exactly what to expect. The wheel “talks” to me as I walk, because it never leaves the surface of the ground. It provides me with all the information I need and I don’t miss a thing. I have used this wheel for about 12 years and am completely satisfied.

Obviously, the wheel is used for feeling and not for support. I find it to be an excellent tool when walking about. It has really become a miracle wheel for me, I cannot say enough good things about it.

I have also added a hook to the cane handle that allows me to hang it from my belt or pocket when folded. If you think you could benefit from one or more of these ideas, please use them. If you have any questions, call or write: Emily Gunsch – 610 North 7th Street – Bismarck, ND 58501 – (701) 223-4275.

Mark Your Calendar!

Back by popular demand, the “Key to Independence...Assistive Technology for All Generations Conference” will once again be held in August of 1977 in Jamestown, North Dakota. Help make this conference a success by sharing topics you most want to learn about. If you have any ideas, time and/or interest in being part of this statewide, all persons event, please contact IPAT.

Funding News: Considerations for Medical Need

Medicaid funding for communication devices is provided when the recommended devices are established to be medically necessary and the least costly equally effective alternative form of treatment to overcome or improve communication limitations that prevent or interfere with the beneficiary’s meaningful participation in current and projected activities.

The medical need for a device must be established by a speech language pathologist (and other professionals, as appropriate) having training and experience in the area of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

The following issues are NOT relevant considerations in the determination of medical need:

- * The cause of the individual’s disability or the age of onset of the impairment;
- * Whether one’s daily activities, communication partners and communication environments are related to or intersect with other benefits or services, i.e., school, work;
- * Pre-requisite demonstration of failure (cognitive, language, literacy, prior treatment);
- * Unavailability or rental and/or warranty of an AAC device, component or

accessory for rental.

Be A Barrier Buster

Obtaining funding for assistive technology requires a commitment of time and energy regardless of the funding stream accessed. Understanding the responsibilities of the funding source and the required features of the application, however, increases the efficiency and success rate of the funding process.

In an effort to increase the effectiveness on funding efforts, IPAT sponsored a strategy session on November 7, 1996, in Bismarck for individuals involved in the pursuit of funding communication devices through Medicaid of North Dakota. Lew Golinker, a nationally recognized attorney and AT funding consultant, defined the legal parameters for funding communication devices via Medicaid and provided strategies for and features of successful prior approval applications.

Particular attention was paid to issues specific to Medicaid of North Dakota. Keys to obtaining funding through our state's Medicaid program include understanding Medicaid's responsibilities and providing the necessary information within the application. If you are unclear on either of these points, IPAT is available for technical assistance.

IPAT serves as a central assistive technology information clearinghouse in North Dakota for all funding sources. Individuals engaged in the funding process are asked to send copies of evaluation reports/applications for prior approval along with the denial/approval status to: Beth Duncan, Funding Coord. – IPAT – P.O. Box 743 – Cavalier, ND 58220. This information will be analyzed to identify common barriers and design a statewide plan for their removal. Together, we can increase access to assistive technology funding for all North Dakota residents.

Equipment Spotlight

The *Scanning Director* is an environmental control device that utilizes infrared signals to control TV's, VCR's, stereos or anything else operated with an infrared remote control. It also has the option of a command center providing on/off control of electrical appliances. It is designed for individuals operating either a single or dual switch and allows them to scan through programmed options and make a selection. Both scanning speed and access time are adjustable. This device is available for trial use through an IPAT Coordinator. It is a product of the Prentke Romich Co., 1-800-262-1984. Base Cost - \$785.



Assistive Technology Info-Line 1-800-451-8693

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Alternative Formats Available – Call 1-800-265-IPAT