

**An Annual Report for the
Interagency Program for Assistive Technology
June 1, 2002 through May 31, 2003**

The Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) raises awareness, disseminates information, conducts training and assessments, works with policy makers, and provides access to trial-use and demonstration of assistive technology (AT) equipment to individuals of all ages with disabilities and long-term illnesses throughout North Dakota.

During the program year beginning June 1, 2002, through May 31, 2003, IPAT increased access to AT by: 1) providing direct consumer assistance to 2,195 individuals; 2) demonstrating AT equipment to 353 individuals; 3) making 938 short-term AT equipment loans; 4) training 4,908 people; 5) answering 1,148 requests for technical assistance from various state and local agencies; 6) collaborating with over 33 agencies/organizations for training delivery, and/or to increase program/system efficiency and effectiveness; and 7) developed and disseminated 13 new products.

Ensuring that all people with disabilities in North Dakota – regardless of age or disabling condition – are supported in their efforts to find, fund, and implement assistive technology solutions is the responsibility of 1 director, 3 coordinators, and 1 support person. IPAT is the AT leader in the state, insuring that the rapid advances in technology are not leaving hundreds of North Dakotan's with disabilities behind at work, school, home, and in their community.

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

IPAT Project Structure

The Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) is the *only* program in North Dakota specifically funded to ensure that all people with disabilities have access to the technology devices and services they need to be independent and contributing members of society. IPAT is building an assistive technology (AT) infrastructure within the state that increases access to AT awareness, information, consumer assistance, equipment, training, interagency coordination, advocacy, funding, and policy development for all state residents.

IPAT leads the state in finding assistive technology solutions, thus, helping hundreds of residents with disabilities to learn, work, and live independently. IPAT engages in a variety of innovative initiatives carried out by four regional offices, it is a program of North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Human Services, and is federally funded at \$305,838 through the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The IPAT Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) provides direction and guidance to IPAT. The 15-member committee reflects the diversity of disabilities, ages,

regions, and cultures of the state and serves as a way to link to existing networks and support systems. Its members are either individuals with a disability or have family members with a disability.

IPAT EXPANDS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES IN NORTH DAKOTA

Technology Access Foundation (TAF)

IPAT established a non-profit corporation to conduct educational and promotional activities for the purpose of increasing knowledge about assistive technology for people within North Dakota and its surrounding area. TAF activities will increase access to assistive technology and make assistive technology more available to individuals in order to enhance their learning experiences and lifestyle. The TAF will receive, hold, distribute, and disburse grant funds, contributions, and gifts of money or property for the benefit of increasing knowledge and awareness about assistive technology and to increase access to assistive technology.

Technology Access Center (TAC)

IPAT opened the first comprehensive assistive technology center in the state on December 12, 2002, in Fargo, North Dakota. The purpose of the TAC is to provide: 1) AT assessments; 2) AT trainings; 3) AT demonstrations/equipment set-up and uses; 4) hands-on exploration of AT equipment; and 5) the operation and maintenance of the equipment loan library. The areas of AT equipment highlighted in the TAC include augmentative communication, telecommunications, environmental control/adaptive living, and alternative computer access. The equipment loan library includes equipment in the above areas, as well as recreational and mobility equipment and specialized toys. Informational resources such as publications, pamphlets, fact sheets and videos are also available. The TAC is an AT resource for individuals, employers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, health care providers, school systems, universities, people who provide services to the elderly, and others.

IPAT Delivers AT Services via Telepractice

Telepractice is now available at the IPAT Technology Access Center in Fargo as an AT service option for individuals. North Dakota's ruralness, volatile weather, limited number of AT specialists, and shrinking dollars has made delivering and receiving AT services difficult. Consequently, IPAT investigated various methods of telepractice as a means to address this problem. The University of North Dakota School of Medicine (UND) has a telemedicine program, which utilizes video conferencing capabilities at numerous sites throughout the state. UND believed IPAT's telepractice purposes fit with their mission and agreed to partner with IPAT to assist in developing video conferencing capabilities. They loaned conferencing equipment and provided technical assistance. After a successful trial use, IPAT purchased its own video conferencing equipment and UND provides connectivity to over 200 sites statewide. Telepractice has already proven to be a viable means of expanding AT access and expertise. It has

shown to be cost-effective, has increased the productivity of service providers by decreasing travel time, and benefited individuals by providing timely access to the AT services they need.

IPAT Meets an Assistive Technology Information Need

IPAT created a 38-page document, *Solutions: Assistive Technology for People with Hidden Disabilities*, which features AT devices to aid individuals experiencing difficulties with memory, attention, confusion, task completion, and socialization. IPAT continues to provide this publication as part of training offered to service providers and consumers statewide and makes it available to residents as a stand-alone document. IPAT disseminated it to all other Tech Act projects and, as a result, it has been adopted and/or adapted for use in 5 other states in an effort to address the range of people who can benefit from AT use.

IPAT PROMOTES ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY USE FOR CHILDREN, ADULTS, AND SENIORS

AT Funding Realized Through Private Insurance

IPAT worked with the *Pediatric Quorum* membership at MedCenter One Hospital in Bismarck to change an existing Blue Cross/Blue Shield of North Dakota (BC/BSND) policy. The quorum developed a task force with BC/BSND, parents of children with communication needs, therapists, physicians, vendors, and AT specialists to review an existing policy, which specifically excluded coverage of all augmentative communication devices and services for children. As a result of this task force action, BC/BSND health insurance policies now cover medically necessary augmentative communication devices and services under its standard health insurance policies for an individual under the age of 22 years in North Dakota.

Focus on AT in Employment Through Video Production

IPAT collaborated with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Rocky Mountain Disability & Business Technical Assistance Center (DBTAC), and KAT Productions to create a 10-minute video, *Tap Into the Power of Assistive Technology*. The video provides an overview of assistive technology (AT) in the workplace through narration, interviews, demonstrations, and visuals. AT to accommodate vision, hearing, mobility, and memory losses are introduced. As well, specific AT is highlighted including computer access, screen reading, ergonomics, speech production, magnification, keyboard/mouse alternatives, and telephone use. AT resources and a description of what AT providers can offer businesses are also discussed. The anticipated result of video dissemination is an increase of AT use by both employers and employees in their efforts to remain competitive.

AT as Part of Home and Community Based Services

IPAT has been involved with multiple stakeholders to increase public knowledge about the range of living options for persons with disabilities and long-term

illnesses as part of the Community Inclusion Task Force (CITF). The CITF convened in the summer of 2002, and has identified assistive technology as a necessary consideration for all persons in sustaining personal independence and realizing home and community living options. The task force is looking to promote AT and individual choice for two different populations - those at risk for institutionalization and those who are institutionalized and meet the criteria of the Olmstead Act for community placement.

IPAT SERVICES PROVIDED June 2002 – May 2003

Direct Consumer Assistance

The three IPAT coordinators provided direct consumer assistance services via telephone, to 2,195 individuals. The types of calls and breakout of caller affiliation is provided.

Types of Calls

General Information	691
Assessment Process	503
Equipment	846
Funding	139
Advocacy	16
Total	2,195

Affiliation Represented

Young Child	31
Education	478
Employment	596
DD Adult	107
Older Adult	429
Minority	59
Community	495
Total	2,195

AT Trainings

IPAT provided 26 training sessions attended by 4,908 individuals through regional, statewide, and outreach opportunities.

Number of persons attending IPAT trainings by population served:

Individuals with Disabilities	54
Family Members and/or Representative	180
Service Providers	734
Employers	622
Policy Makers	13
Community Members	3,305
Total	4,908

IPAT Equipment Loan Library AT Device/Equipment Use

The IPAT Equipment Loan Library provides AT equipment for short-term loan to state residents of all ages with disabilities. This meets the on-going need for equipment exploration, trial-use, assessment, and funding justification. There have been 938 equipment loans this grant cycle. The number of loans and population affiliation (duplicate count) is provided.

Young Child (Part C)	23
Education	347
Employment	237
Older Adult	76
Minority	26
Community	257
Total	966

IPAT's AT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED

On-line Used Equipment Bulletin Board: In an effort to serve North Dakota residents looking to list or locate used assistive technology devices, IPAT posted all used equipment listings on the IPAT website and made a toll-free number available. IPAT improved the service by updating all listings and implementing a new process to keep the listings current. Using electronic telecommunication and a toll-free line to promote reuse is an effective means to reach the most rural consumers and service providers. At last count, there had been \$146,329 worth of AT obtained through this IPAT service.

Mobile Service Project: The Adaptive Equipment Services program provides fabrication and customization services to consumers in rural/remote areas of North Dakota. This service, typically unavailable to the rural consumer utilizes a mobile van, which goes directly to the remote sites with its fabrication equipment and staff on-board. A total of 243 consumers have received services from this program in the last 12 months. Services range from work-site accommodations to adapted seating systems.

NORTH DAKOTAN'S SPEAK OUT ABOUT THE IMPACT OF IPAT

“Thanks to the ‘try before you buy’ loan program through IPAT, I was able to look at many different mouse options and was able to try different mouse alternatives before buying.”

Karen Schelinder – Grand Forks, ND

“With a new wheelchair and adaptations to my three-wheeled scooter done by Don and Byron with the help of IPAT, my posture has improved, I have been pain free and have more strength and stamina than I ever believed possible.”

Inga Stromme – Rugby, ND

“With the ever growing emphasis being placed on AT as an avenue for accommodation within school settings and special needs students, it is great to know I can call IPAT to trouble-shoot a student’s particular learning difficulty.”

Kelly Mabry – Bismarck, ND

“I would like to convey to you how an automated pill dispenser allowed my 87-year old father, who was experiencing short term memory problems to continue to live independently.”

Darlene Lysne – Wahpeton, ND

“Bryan Karges, an avid reader and a person with cerebral palsy lost his ability to turn pages after a necessary surgery. Bryan’s family located IPAT, borrowed an automatic page turning device and it was a resounding success. His community organized a fund raiser, and in 6 weeks purchased Bryan a device of his own.”

Karlene Hill – Beulah, ND

“When I remember what life was like before assistive technology, the feelings of helplessness, the feelings of dependence on others – I would not want to go back.”

Joan Carlsten – Minot, ND

“The benefits of voice recognition software discovered through IPAT have been fantastic. I have the system at home and it was also easily installed at my computer at work, I am much more efficient on the computer, and yes, even report writing is much more enjoyable.”

Judy Siegle – Fargo, ND

HOW DOES IPAT HELP?

Aging and Independence: Even when age or disability limits functioning, people want to be independent, mobile, and productive. They want to be self-sufficient, live in homes of their own choosing, and maintain control over their lives. To remain independent, technology becomes a critical tool for the aging population. Many individuals and service providers are unaware of assistive technology solutions and need help in identifying and using them.

Information Technology: As the electronic age revolutionizes the way we access government, business, and service industries, we must make sure that people with disabilities aren’t left on the outside looking in. There are many ways to give people the access they need, but awareness of why it’s needed and how to do it lags far behind. Information technology personnel need assistance in understanding the impact of disability as it relates to information technology access and how to comply with federal and state standards.

Employment: People with disabilities want to work. They want to contribute to society, enjoy personal fulfillment, and earn a living. The state needs workers and assistive technology can be the key. Employers need assistance in identifying the technology solutions that will preserve or enhance their workforce.

Health: People with medical problems need technology to improve or maintain their health and ward off secondary and/or progressive disabilities. But hundreds of people with disabilities – both children and adults – are uninsured or have insurance coverage that limits access to medically necessary technology and professional assessment and therapy. Policymakers need an increased understanding of the medical necessity of assistive technology in improving and maintaining health.

Education: Every student must master technology skills in order to succeed and be productive. It is essential that the technology used in our schools leave no one behind. But preparing teachers to integrate and use technology to support students with disabilities in the classroom is a formidable task. Parents, students, and educators are looking for assistance in identifying technology solutions that will promote full participation in school.



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This report is available in alternative formats

The Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) is the only program in North Dakota specifically funded to ensure people with disabilities, and those experiencing the effects of aging, have access to the technology devices and services they need to be active participants in society. IPAT leads the state in assistive technology solutions, assisting hundreds of residents with disabilities or long-term illnesses to achieve, enjoy, and prosper through the use of AT.