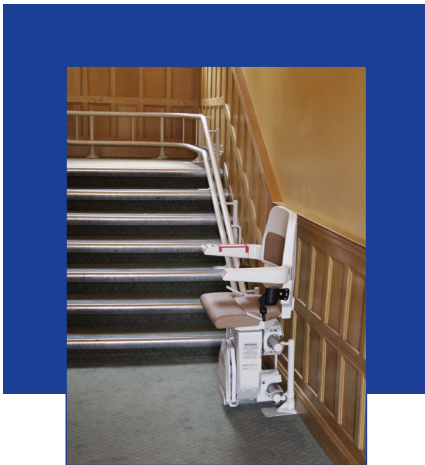FCS4-413

Home Accessibility
Assistive Technology

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Assistive technologies make it easier for people to work, learn, and live more safely, comfortably, and independently in their homes and communities.

What Is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology includes devices and services designed to increase, maintain or improve functional abilities of people living with disabilities. A wide variety of assistive technologies is available, from high-tech computers and mobility devices to low-tech items such as magnifying glasses, modified furniture, and transfer aids.

Assistive technology allows people to do things that they might not otherwise be able to do. It reduces the impact of a disability and increases the opportunity for enjoying an optimal level of safety and independence. Services and devices help individuals participate more fully in recreational activities, communicate better, learn more easily, and perform daily activities such as bathing, dressing, and eating. As a person with a disability gains independence, family members and other caregivers may experience a lessening of responsibilities.

Devices and Services

Assistive technology comprises two categories: devices and services. Assistive devices are any equipment used by a person with a disability to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities. Assistive technology services means any service—evaluation, purchasing or leasing, selection, design, fitting, coordination and training—designed to assist a person with a disability select, obtain and use assistive technology devices.

Assistive technology devices
Low-Tech (lower-cost, typically non-electronic)
- Adapted furniture, tools, medical equipment or utensils
- Mobility and transfer aids
- Hook and loop fasteners such as Velcro™
- Large-print books
- Magnifying glasses
- Pen and pencil grips

Mid-Tech (moderately priced, easy to operate electronic devices)
- Digital tape recorders
- Audio books
- Special lighting or acoustical treatments
- Adapted keyboards
- Hearing aids
- Text telephones

High-Tech (more expensive devices that typically include electronics or computers)
- Communications devices/software
- Talking calculators or word processors
- Word prediction, graphic organizer or flowchart software
- Hand controls, lifts and car door openers
- Electric wheelchairs

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Assistive technology services

- **The KATS Network Coordinating Center** (Kentucky Assistive Technology Act Program) serves Kentucky residents of all ages with disabilities of all types as well as their families, employers and employment service providers, educators, health care and social service providers and others seeking information about assistive technology and accessible information technology. KATS also provides short-term loans of AT devices, AT device demonstrations, AT reuse and training and technical assistance on AT related topics.
  - Local - (502) 429-4484.
    Toll Free - (800) 327-5287.
    www.katsnet.org/.

Regional KATS Centers

- **Bluegrass Technology Center**
  409 Southland Drive
  Lexington, KY 40503
  Toll Free - (800) 209-7767
  Local - (859) 294-4343
  www.bluegrass-tech.org

- **Enabling Technologies of Kentuckiana** (enTECH)
  Spalding University
  901 S. Third Street
  Louisville, KY 40203
  Toll Free - (800) 896-8941
  Local - (502) 585-9911, ext 2648
  www.spalding.edu/entech

- **Redwood Assistive Technology Center**
  71 Orphanage Road
  Ft. Mitchell, KY 41017
  Toll Free - (800) 728-9807
  Local - (859) 331-0880
  www.redwoodnky.org

- **Western Kentucky Assistive Technology Center** (WKATC)
  Wendell Foster Campus
  815 Triplett Street
  Owensboro, KY 42302
  Toll Free - (800) 209-6202
  Local - (270) 689-1738
  www.wkatc.org/

- **The Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation** (KATLC) offers low-interest loans for qualified applicants with disabilities who need assistive technology.
  Toll free - 1-877-675-0195.
  http://katlc.ky.gov/.

- **Kentucky AgrAbility** assists rural and farm families who face the challenges of a disability. Toll Free - 800-333-2814 or 859-257-1845.
  http://www.ca.uky.edu/ANR/Agrability/NewAgrabilityWebsite/index.php

- **Kentucky.gov** is the Commonwealth's official web portal that offers information and services for Kentucky citizens including Accessibility services and related agencies. http://kentucky.gov/health/Pages/disabilityResources.aspx.

- **Telecommunications Access Program of KY** (TAP). TAP is offered through the KY Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH). The TAP program provides amplified phones, TTY's, CapTel's, and wireless phones at no cost to deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired residents of KY.
  Local - (502) 573-2604
  www.kcdhh.ky.gov/oea/tddprog.html

Where Do I Use Assistive Technology?

Because assistive technology helps you to go about your activities of daily living, learning, working and playing, it may be used in any setting—the workplace, classroom, home or the community. With the variety of available assistive technology, just about any task can be addressed.

A major focus of the Assistive Technology Act is to increase access to and acquisition of Assistive Technology to individuals of all ages and all disability types in the areas of Education, Employment, Community Living and IT/Telecommunications. Statewide AT Act programs provide information to individuals about what assistive technology devices and services are available and where to obtain them, device loan and demonstration centers in which an individual can try-out devices and/or borrow devices for a short period of time, make referrals to funding resources for purchasing or acquiring assistive technology, device exchange and recycling programs that provide individuals with used equipment at little to no cost, and affordable loan programs that allow individuals to borrow money to purchase assistive technology.

Statewide Assistive Technology Act programs also work to ensure that school systems, state agencies and other entities both public and private use a pro-active approach by planning for expected needs, procuring equipment and services and having assistive technologies available before a person's need intensifies. Schools, for example, are to consider assistive technology devices and services when an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is being developed. A similar system is in place for individuals receiving disability service. Once in the plan, you can count on receiving assisted technology as needed to meet your goals.

How Do I Get Assistive Technology?

To begin the evaluation process, contact a medical professional or an assistive technology service near you. Needs for assistive technology can be analyzed during a formal evaluation made

by a well-rounded team of medical and service professionals. The assessment may include physical and occupational therapies, vocational rehabilitation, psychology, social services, recreational therapy, vision therapy, audiology and medicine. In addition to your goals, age, physical and cognitive ability, the evaluation team will take into consideration the environmental factors that will affect assistive technology, so it is useful to perform assessments in the environment(s) where the equipment will be used. Statewide Assistive Technology Act programs can also provide assistive technology device demonstrations and short term loans of devices to assist individuals in making an informed choice.

Include family members and other support people in the evaluation process, as you will likely receive helpful feedback and instruction in addition to information on funding sources and recommendations for training and follow-up services.

How Much Does Assistive Technology Cost?

Assistive technology ranges from low-cost, low-tech devices to high-tech, expensive devices. Many states and local communities offer programs and services that help people with disabilities obtain and pay for assistive technology. To locate centers and resources in your area go to:

- **Disability.gov** is the federal government website for comprehensive information on disability programs and services in communities nationwide. The site links to more than 14,000 resources from federal, state and local government agencies; academic institutions; and non-profit organizations. You can find answers to questions about everything from Social Security benefits to employment to affordable and accessible housing. www.disability.gov/.

- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** offers an extensive list of State Assistive Technology Projects. The projects, funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, provide technical assistance on assistive technology, consultation, product demonstrations, equipment borrowing and low-interest loans for individuals with disabilities. 1-800-526-7234 (voice) 877-781-9403 (TTY). http://askjan.org/.

- **Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation (KATLC)** KATLC offers low interest loans for qualified applicants with disabilities who need assistive technology.
Toll Free - 1-877-675-0195
http://www.katlc.ky.gov/

- **KATS Network Coordinating Center**. www.katsnet.org/

- **Pass It On Center**
Provides a listing of assistive technology reuse programs.
www.passitoncenter.org/locations/search.aspx

- **The Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA)** RESNA offers the State Assistive Technology and Telework Financial Loan Program, which lists offices in each state and territory that provide financial assistance for assistive technology.
1700 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209
Voice - (703) 524-6686
TTY - (703) 524-6639
http://www.resna.org/

Considerations

A tremendous variety of assistive technology is available today, providing the opportunity for nearly all people to access assistive technology and move about more safely and independently at home and in the community. The assistive device or service best for you will depend on your sensory, physical and cognitive abilities. As you, your family and team of professionals evaluate what is best for your needs, consider

- How easily the technology can be moved from one environment to another
- How well the device will stand up to daily wear and tear
- How available the vendors or manufacturers are for repair and assistance
- Whether training and support are available
- How easy the equipment is to use
- How easily changes can be made
- Whether the device has the capacity to grow as your needs change

Related Extension Publications

Home Accessibility: One Size Fits All
 (FCS4-414)

Home Accessibility: Bedrooms
(FCS4-415)

Home Accessibility: Bathrooms
(FCS4-416)

Home Accessibility: Kitchens
(FCS4-417)

Home Accessibility: Resources
(FCS4-418)

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