

I CAN Centre for Assistive Technology

What is Assistive Technology?



Assistive technology is used to help people who have disabilities to do things for themselves - to be active and independent. Activities of daily living can be impossible for you if you have severe disabilities. The use of assistive technology can give you greater control over your life, and help you be more involved in activities at home, at work and in your community. More simply put, it helps you do things for yourself.

Some examples of how assistive technology can be used during daily activities include managing the telephone, using a wheelchair to get around at home and in the community, using speech generating communicate devices to communicate with others, operating equipment to turn on lights, the TV and appliances, using the computer to read or write, or to learn new skills. Assistive technology can be used in many important ways throughout your day.

The term assistive technology covers both the “hard” technology – the tools, special equipment or devices, as well as the “soft” technology – information and training, to help you, your family and support workers learn how to set up and use the technology appropriately. The solutions suggested may be simple “no tech” ideas and strategies, “low tech” systems or more complex “high tech” tools. In many cases the solutions may be a combination of all of these.

How does the I CAN Centre for Assistive Technology work?

Before we schedule an evaluation, we obtain information in a variety of ways to get to know your needs - through our referral forms, videotape information, telephone conversations with you, reading about your goals.

First, we need to find out what tasks you need to do that may be met by using assistive technology. We believe that it is important for I CAN Centre team members to be familiar with your goals and expectations, to understand what you need to be able to do, and to be aware of the local resources that are available to help you achieve these goals. You, your family and community members work in partnership with I CAN Centre members as a team to develop a plan to achieve your goals. The I CAN Centre team members may include an Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech-Language Pathologist, Rehabilitation Engineer or Assistive Technology Specialist.

Using assistive technology can have a major impact on your life and those around you. It is important to obtain support from the people who will be involved in helping you use assistive technology. It is generally helpful to have one specific person from your family or community who can support you, or who may take on the role of advocate or helper if needed.

What happens during the Evaluation?

During the first contact we will clarify exactly what needs you think may be met by using assistive technology. It is helpful to have all the key people involved in your program present at this session to participate in the discussion and agree to the follow-up action that is needed to help you meet your goals. Telephone or video conferencing may be used to bring people together.

Next, we will assess your abilities and strengths depending on your needs. Areas assessed may include language, vision, and physical skills. This will help us identify the features and characteristics of technology which will be most useful for you. At the end of the first session we will put together a plan of action for follow-up services, as needed. This may include equipment trials, individual or group training sessions, and/or attending an educational program. It will likely take a number of sessions to complete the evaluation and find the best system for your needs.

What happens next?

We will provide a written plan that details what we will do and what you and community members will do to achieve the goals that have been set within a certain time frame. You will have ongoing access to our resources, materials, device loaning library, and technical support. We will provide instruction to help you develop skills and strategies to use assistive technology. Instruction may be provided directly to you or to significant others who then help support you.

What do we expect from you?

We want you to be active participants in this process. You can do this by ensuring that we have current information about you and that the key people involved with you participate in the evaluation and planning. Because much of the work with assistive technology happens during device trials and after a device has been purchased, we would like to work closely with the people who will be helping you. You, your family and community agencies are responsible for fundraising for assistive technology. We also depend on you to provide feedback - to ask for help when needed, to let us know when things are not working or need to be re-evaluated, as well as when things are going well.

I CAN Centre for Assistive Technology
Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, Alberta Health Services
10230-111 Avenue, Edmonton, AB, T5G 0 B7
780-735-6071 Fax 780-735-6072
Web site: www.albertahealthservices.ca/icancentre.asp