
Principles: Access to Assistive Technology

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BACKGROUND

In *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the United States Supreme Court held that assistive technology devices are items, pieces of equipment, software or systems that are used to increase, maintain, or improve capabilities of people with disabilities. This includes adaptations to existing equipment and services. Assistive technology devices and services enable people to: exercise greater control over their lives; participate in and contribute more fully to activities in their homes, schools, places of employment and communities; increase their interactions with people who do not have disabilities; and to otherwise benefit from opportunities that are afforded to people without disabilities.

PRINCIPLES

Disability Rights California is committed to increasing access to and funding for assistive technology and ensuring that people with disabilities have access to assistive technology and services and access to information, training and facilitation to help them make informed decisions about obtaining or maintaining assistive technology devices and services so they can learn how to use such devices and services. Access to assistive technology helps people with disabilities:

1. Exercise self-determination and autonomy, and be more fully included and integrated into the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of society and their local communities.
2. Increase communication with others that is essential for social connections, self-expression, self-reliance, health and safety, education, work and independent living.
3. Make transitions between various life activities, including service programs, employment, educational opportunities, housing, and parenting.
4. Access services needed for their well-being and health care. Methods to achieve this include: supporting efforts to expand the availability of medical devices through public and private health plans; challenging restrictive definitions of durable medical equipment (DME) by such plans; advocating for removal of unreasonable price caps on DME; challenging arbitrary life-time caps; and advocating for removal of unreasonable administrative hurdles to obtaining DME and increasing the reimbursement rate for DME providers.¹
5. Access educational opportunities comparable to students without disabilities. Methods to achieve this include increasing the availability of adaptive computers and devices designed to assist students; and removing access barriers to educational technologies and educational materials utilized in schools, colleges, and universities.
6. Train for, pursue, and keep meaningful careers and employment opportunities. Assistive technology devices should be provided as a reasonable accommodation to achieve these goals.
7. Have equal access to public information and services. Methods to achieve this include: ensuring that information provided by government agencies (e.g., forms, notices, and voter information pamphlets) is available in accessible formats and on accessible websites; and ensuring that existing and new technologies and services (e.g., voting systems, information kiosks, ATMs, websites, and electronic readers) available to the general public are designed to be accessible,

¹ The ACA requires “essential health benefits” to be covered by health plans. However, DME is a “reviewable benefit” meaning a physician must determine, through a face-to-face meeting, if it is essential for the person to be covered. If it is determined to be essential, it will be covered with no cap. If not, caps apply. [“Return to Main Document”](#)

available, useable by people with disabilities and compatible with assistive technology devices, and must meet federal and state accessibility standards.

8. Obtain and maintain affordable, accessible, safe housing through reasonable modifications, accommodations, or other methods or programs to fund ramps, automatic doors, grab bars, flashing doorbells or visual fire alarms for people who are deaf, automatic shut-off systems for faucets or stoves for people with impaired memory, and other assistive devices that help individuals with disabilities remain independently and safely in their homes.