



NANCY BARGMANN
DIRECTOR

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Developmental Services
1215 O Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
www.dds.ca.gov



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TO: REGIONAL CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) IN EARLY START

The Department of Developmental Services (Department) issues this correspondence to provide guidance to regional centers in facilitating access to assistive technology consistent with a child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). This guidance applies to all children under 36 months who are receiving regional center services.

Background

On January 22, 2024, the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, issued [guidance](#) in support of children who need assistive technology (AT) devices and services for meaningful access and engagement in education. This guidance applies to children who have IFSPs through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or Early Start in California.

[California regulations](#) state “communication development means the acquisition of expressive and/or receptive language skills which include understanding and/or use of the following: gestures, facial expressions, speech reading, sign language, body postures and vocal and visual contacts with another person.” Consistent with federal requirements, assistive technology is an early intervention service defined in [California Code of Regulations \(CCR\), Title 17, section 52000\(b\)\(5-6\)](#).

Assistive Technology Device

[Per CCR, Title 17, section 52000\(b\)\(5\)](#) and [CFR Title 34 , section 303.13\(b\)\(1\)\(i\)](#), an assistive technology device is “any item, piece, of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of an infant or toddler with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, including a cochlear implant, or the optimization (e.g., mapping), maintenance, or replacement of that device.”

Assistive Technology Service

[California regulations](#) and [federal regulations](#) define assistive technology service as “any service that directly assists an infant or toddler with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

Below are examples of AT devices for individuals with a variety of disabilities, as highlighted in the recent federal guidance.

1. Text-to-speech software to listen to digital materials.
2. Augmentative and alternative communication devices to assist children with disabilities to communicate with their families and peers. This not only helps in developing communication skills, but also helps improve their self-esteem and confidence, which can have a positive impact on their overall wellbeing; and
3. Visual schedules and visual timers to better understand daily routines and the passing of time. These AT devices allow children with disabilities to participate in daily activities in a timely manner and understand what is expected of them.

Funding for Assistive Technology

When a comprehensive, multidisciplinary evaluation (as defined in [Title 34, section 303.321 of the CFR](#)) determines that an infant or toddler has a delay in communication development, the IFSP team is encouraged to include in the development of the IFSP an evaluation of AT devices and services that may address the child's communication needs. In facilitating access to assistive technology, specifically robust communication devices and services, regional centers may use Communication Aides (service code 112) in purchasing assistive technology.

If you have questions regarding this correspondence, please email earlystart@dds.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original signed by:

MARICRIS ACON
Deputy Director
Children, Adolescents, and Young Adult Services Division

cc: Regional Center Administrators
Regional Center Directors of Consumer Services
Regional Center Community Service Directors
Amy Westling, Association of Regional Center Agencies
Nancy Bargmann, Department of Developmental Services
Brian Winfield, Department of Developmental Services
Carla Castañeda, Department of Developmental Services
Ernie Cruz, Department of Developmental Services
Erin Paulsen-Brady, Department of Developmental Services