

# Did You Know?

## PAAT Programs Can Provide a Significant Range of Services Advocating for AT Devices and AT Services

Since 1994, Protection and Advocacy agencies have received a grant to deliver Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology (PAAT) services. The PAAT grant, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), allows attorneys and advocates to employ various advocacy strategies to help individuals with disabilities acquire assistive technology (AT) devices and AT services.

Services under the PAAT program fall into five primary categories:

- É Cases . negotiation, mediation, hearings, litigation
- É Information & referral (I&R) - typically information about how to obtain services elsewhere
- É Technical assistance (TA) . a legal analysis of how an individual can self-advocate for rights with an AT funding source or how another advocate can assist an individual. PAAT programs will report this as either case activity or I&R, depending on the scope of the TA
- É Outreach . training, preparation/dissemination of written materials, promotion of the PAAT project
- É Policy work . (as permitted by federal guidelines) serving on state agency advisory groups; providing written comments to proposed regulations; testifying at public hearings; working to enact laws, regulations, and policy related to AT funding; working with non-government entities, like movie theaters or private insurers, to improve access to AT.

All of this work is designed to help one or more individuals with disabilities obtain appropriate AT devices and/or services on a timely basis.

The federal AT Act provides definitions for AT devices and AT services. An AT device means 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 functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.+ 29 USC 3002(a)(3). The term AT device+certainly covers a range of equipment to overcome limitations to mobility (wheelchairs, scooters, walkers), sight (optical scanning devices, Braille printers), speaking (speech generating devices), and hearing (hearing aids, cochlear implants). It also includes adaptations to everyday items, like hand controls on a car or an adapted computer keyboard. Some advocates have wanted to call guide dogs or sign interpreters AT devices as, like the equipment described above, they use a unique intervention to overcome the limits caused by the disability. However, since the AT device definition envisions an item, piece of equipment, or product system,+this would not include a person or service animal.

An AT service is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an [AT] device. It includes evaluations to determine the need for a device; customizing or adapting the device for its user; coordination and use of necessary therapies, interventions, or services with AT devices; and repairs, maintenance and training (of the individual, family member, or professional) on how to use the device. 29 USC 3002(a)(4). The same definitions are used in the federal special education regulations and the federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) regulations. 34 CFR 300.5, 300.6 (special education); 34 CFR 361(b)(7), 361(b)(8) (VR).

Attorneys and advocates often overlook this expansive definition of AT services when deciding whether a particular case can be handled through PAAT. For example, advocacy may be needed to get a school district to agree to provide AT services: to help a student get into a wheelchair or bathroom commode; to hire an outside evaluator to determine what computer adaptations are needed by a student; to provide training to the student and the parent(s) to allow the student to learn to use the new laptop adaptations at home; to install a package of software and develop shortcuts on the computer to allow the student to use the adaptations. Similarly, advocacy may be needed to get a state VR program to provide AT services to: aid an individual in selecting the right package of vehicle modifications to use a van from a wheelchair; maintain the adapted computer and software purchased for a college student; and, if not available through other funding, provide speech therapy services to allow a student to learn how to efficiently use a speech generating device.

Those who are reading this post, as email, are encouraged to use [reply all](#) to share comments or questions that they want to reach all participants on the list serve. Use [reply](#) to communicate only with the person who did the posting. In the future, we plan a more extensive article on this topic as part of our *AT Advocate* newsletter.

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