



General AAC Questions

What does AAC stand for?

AAC stands for Augmentative and Alternative Communication. This communication system encompasses all of the methods that someone can use to communicate. People of all ages may use AAC if they have trouble with speech or language skills.

What is an “AAC system?”

AAC systems can look different depending on the needs of each individual. They can include a combination of manual signs, gestures, finger spelling, tangible objects, line drawings, picture communication boards, letter boards, or speech-generating devices. Each AAC system will be tailored to meet each individual’s specific needs.

How do AAC systems work?

Each AAC system looks and works differently and will require training and practice to learn how to use it effectively. There is often some trial and error to determine which system will work the best for each individual.

How do I know if I or my loved one will benefit from an AAC system?

You might consider exploring the use of an AAC system if you or your loved one has experienced challenges with speech or language skills. These disabilities could include impairments of reception and processing or assembling and creating words. The use of an AAC system may be temporary or it may be a lifelong support.

What factors may be considered when choosing communication supports for an effective and efficient AAC system?

Although this list is not all inclusive, some factors that may be considered when choosing an AAC system could include the following:

- The individual's current speech level
- The potential that the individual may lose their speech in the future
- The level of support that this individual needs
- Literacy knowledge
- Visual and auditory abilities
- Their ability to match words and pictures with meanings
- Which access mode will work best for this individual
- How the individual can best interact with the environment

Are there alternative access options for AAC systems?

There are several access methods that can be used for AAC systems. Some of these include pointing, eye gaze technology, sip and puff mechanisms, button pressing, typing, or hand movements.

I would like to explore the possibility of an AAC system for myself or my loved one, how do I begin this process?

To begin this process, if you do not already have a Speech Language Pathologist, first speak with your doctor about getting a referral to a Speech Language Pathologist. They will assess speech communication needs and will be able to help you decide on which AAC system is best for you or your loved one.

Are there options to trial systems before I decide?

Yes – most AAC vendors provide an option to trial the device before purchasing. Ask about trial options through the vendor of your choosing. There are also options through loan programs such as the Easterseals Iowa Lending Library to try devices for free for 30 days. For more information about this program, you can call 1-866-866-8782, email atinfo@eastersealsia.org, or you can check out their website at <https://iowaat.org/>

Can I use an iPad or tablet as an AAC system?

Yes – if you have access to an iPad or tablet, there are several AAC apps available. Some of these are free, and some of them cost money depending on which app you prefer. Search for Speech Communication apps on the app store on your tablet to see what is available for your device. Connecting with a Speech Language Pathologist would be helpful to assist you with this process.

How do I get training on my AAC system?

Your Speech-Language Pathologist, AAC vendor, and/or teacher may be able to provide training to the AAC user, caregiver, and service providers. You can also receive training from your behavioral therapist, if you are utilizing behavior therapy services. The AAC system should be monitored and adjusted over time so updates can be made to the system as needed.

Are there support groups/resources for families?

There are various resources available for families depending on where you live. To find virtual/online support groups, social media is a great place to start. Type in “AAC Support Group” to find what is available through social media.

There are several podcasts that provide information and support surrounding AAC. Some of these include “Speechie Side Up”, “Minspeak Moments”, and “Talking with Tech AAC podcast”, although there are several others available.

To find in-person support groups, ask your Speech-Language Pathologist about resources that are available in your area.

Speech Language Pathologist Access

How do I get a Speech Language Pathologist evaluation?

An individual can ask their doctor about getting a referral to a Speech Language Pathologist (often referred to as an SLP). It is also possible to request an evaluation through your local school and Area Education Agency (AEA). There is also the option to do a self-referral for an evaluation.

How do I find an SLP in my area of the state?

A doctor may be able to direct you to a Speech Language Pathologist in your area. Conducting a Google search, asking other community members and providers may be helpful, along with contacting the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for any SLP’s in your area. You can find more information on their website at www.asha.org, or you can call them at 800-638-8255.

Funding AAC Systems

What are the various funding sources for an AAC system for an adult, for a child, for an employee?

Various funding sources include private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, or private pay. There could also be grants, scholarships, or other programs available to help cover the cost of AAC systems. Iowa Compass is a great resource to explore funding options. Iowa Compass can be reached by phone at 1-800-779-2001, or you can find their resource database online at www.iowacompass.org.

Insurance

Are AAC evaluations covered by Medicare/Medicaid?

Medicare/Medicaid may cover the cost of an AAC evaluation conducted by a licensed speech-language pathologist.

Are Speech-Generating Devices (SGDs) covered by Medicare/Medicaid?

Medicare/Medicaid may cover the cost of medically necessary AAC systems that are considered durable medical equipment with the evaluation performed by a Speech-Language Pathologist and a prescription from a medical provider.

Each person's eligibility and circumstance are unique. So, it is important to first contact your Medicaid/Medicare service coordinator or case worker to learn how to apply for possible funding for AAC systems as Durable Medical Equipment.

Most often, proof of medical necessity or letters of recommendation by a medical provider and/or a licensed speech-language pathologist are required. If an individual has a Medicaid/Medicare coordinator they may be able to help you find a Speech-Language Pathologist to complete an AAC assessment and identify an appropriate AAC strategy. Updating the Individual Service Plan to include AAC strategy goals and training for users and caregivers should be considered. Follow this link for more information: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Augmentative%20Communications%20Road%20Map%20%281%29.pdf>

What do I do if my request for an AAC system through Medicare/Medicaid is denied?

If an individual's request for an AAC system is denied, they have the right to file an appeal. An appeal is a formal request an individual can make when they disagree with a coverage or payment decision. Contact your service coordinator or case worker to go through the process of filing an appeal as the process is unique for each entity. Often, the Speech-Language Pathologist will write the appeal. The funding departments of most major speech generating device vendors will also assist in this process.

If the request is denied a second time, an individual can explore possible legal advice through Disability Rights Iowa. Their phone number is 515-278-2502, and their website is: disabilityrightsowa.org.

How do I apply for funding for an AAC system through private insurance?

Private insurance may cover the cost of medically necessary AAC systems that are considered durable medical equipment with the evaluation performed by a Speech-Language Pathologist and a prescription from a medical provider.

Each individual's private insurance is unique. Thus, the individual should first contact their insurance company to request the policy on Durable Medical Equipment (DME) or assistive technology. A doctor or SLP may need to complete the request.

Then, it would be suggested to consult with a Speech-Language Pathologist to complete an AAC assessment and identify an appropriate AAC strategy. It is likely that the insurance provider will require a proof of medical necessity or letters of recommendation by a medical provider and/or the licensed Speech-Language Pathologist. For more information follow this link:

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Augmentative%20Communications%20Road%20Map%20%281%29.pdf>

What do I do if my request for an AAC system through private insurance is denied?

If a request through private insurance is denied, the individual can file an internal appeal. By filing an internal appeal, an individual is requesting their health plan provider to review the denial decision in a fair and complete way. Most generally, although unique to each provider, an individual has up to six months after finding out the claim was denied to file an internal appeal. Often the Speech-Language Pathologist will write the appeal. The funding departments of most major speech generating device vendors can also assist in this process. For more information on this, follow this link: <https://content.naic.org/sites/default/files/consumer-health-insurance-appeal-denied-claims.pdf>

If an internal appeal is denied, an individual can request an external review. An external review is performed by an independent review organization. An individual must ask for an external review within a specific amount of time after receiving the decision of the internal appeal. An individual can contact their care coordinator for specifics on the timeframe and process for each unique insurance company.

If an individual's request is denied again, they can explore possible legal advice through Disability Rights Iowa. Their phone number is 515-278-2502, and their website is: disabilityrightsiowa.org.

AAC Systems at School

Will my school district pay for an AAC system?

Students receiving special education services have a legal right to AAC assessments and supports to meet their communication needs. Through evaluation, there must be evidence/data that supports the individual's need for AAC to benefit the child in accessing his or her education.

First, request an AAC assessment in writing from the school district and work with an SLP to complete an AAC assessment and identify the appropriate AAC strategy.

Then, update your IEP to include the AAC strategy. Include needed software or apps, incorporate training for the AAC user, teachers, and parents/guardians, and request time for programming updates, etc. in addition to training. For example, if new words need to be added to a communication device, you may consider clearly defining in the IEP who will be responsible for that task. It is also recommended to require AAC use 24 hours a day, meaning that the AAC will remain with the student at all times. However, this can get tricky depending on the ownership of the device. There is not always a goal tied to the AAC system, however, if there are specific AAC goals they should also be added to the IEP. Often the AAC system is listed in the IEP as an accommodation. For more information follow this link:

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Augmentative%20Communications%20Road%20Map%20%281%29.pdf>

How do I get an AAC system included in my child's IEP?

When an IEP is developed, the IEP team must consider and determine if the learner requires assistive technology support to access the general education curriculum. This also includes the use of an AAC system. Data-based decision-making is required to determine if the support of an AAC system will increase the learner's access and engagement with curricular materials. It must assist the learner to be involved and progress in the Iowa Core Curriculum and assessments, progress toward their annual IEP goals, pursue their course of study and postsecondary expectations, participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities with other learners with and without disabilities, and be educated with other learners with and without disabilities. If it is determined that the use of an AAC system would allow them to reach these goals, then it can be included in the IEP. For more information, follow this link: <https://iowaideainformation.org/special-education/individualized-education-programs/components-of-an-iep/assistive-technology/>

What do I do if my request for an AAC system through my child’s school district is denied?

Put your concerns in writing by either sending a letter or email to the school that outlines the concerns, requesting a team meeting to discuss the use of an AAC system asking the IEP team members to help you understand the details of why the use of an AAC system was denied. More information can be found on the ASK Resource Center website about Prior Written Notice here: <https://www.askresource.org/resources/prior-written-notice>.

If an individual need further support, ASK Resource Center is a great place to find additional information and advocacy. Their phone number is 1-800-450-8667, and their website is www.askresource.org.

How is it ensured that children who use AAC have uninterrupted access to their AAC system at school, and are provided with functional opportunities to use their AAC system to communicate with peers and teachers?

Details on AAC use at school should be included in the learner’s IEP. If there are concerns about AAC system use at school, an individual can request an IEP team meeting to go through the details of how and when the AAC system is used during the school day.

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