



Your Guide to Assistive Technology

From

The Arizona Center for Disability Law

How can I contact the center?

Our address, phone, website and email information are listed below:

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Website address:

www.azdisabilitylaw.org

Email address:

center@azdisabilitylaw.org

Can I get this guide online?

You can get this guide online and in other forms. Just ask us.

Can this guide replace legal advice?

No. This guide gives basic facts to people about their rights and laws that protect them. It is not the same thing as legal advice. You may need more facts or to speak with a lawyer. Contact the Arizona Center for Disability Law or talk to a lawyer in your area.

Federal and state laws can change at any time. To make sure the facts in this guide are still correct, contact the Arizona Center for Disability Law. You also can talk to a lawyer in your area.

Who paid for this guide?

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Your Guide to Assistive Technology

How can this guide help me?

It helps you learn about:

- Assistive technology devices and services
- How to find the right assistive technology device for you
- How to get help paying for the device
- What to do if your request for a device is denied
- Programs and laws that support the use of assistive technology
- Resources for more information

What is assistive technology?

Assistive technology, also called AT, is a device or service that helps people with disabilities function better in everyday life. AT helps people with physical and mental disabilities.

Assistive technology device – is any device that helps a person be more independent at home, work, and in the community. Examples of AT devices include:

- Living aids – equipment used to help a person do everyday activities, such as using a shower chair to take a shower
- Mobility aids – equipment that helps people get from one place to another, such as wheelchairs and scooters
- Computer software and hardware programs – programs that help people use computers to meet their needs, such as voice recognition software, screen readers and certain kinds of keyboards
- Prosthetic and orthotic devices – equipment to help a person better use or replace a damaged part of the body, such as leg braces or an artificial leg
- Communication aids – devices that help people with speech and language problems communicate better with others, such as picture communication boards
- Special learning materials and teaching aids – devices that help people learn better, such as computer software programs, page turners, and pencil grips

Assistive technology service – is any service that helps a person with a disability choose, get, use, and maintain an AT device. Examples of AT services include:

- Providing information about different AT devices
- Evaluating a person's need for an AT device
- Evaluating how well a specific AT device will meet the person's need
- Helping the person choose the AT device
- Training the person, family members, and friends on how to use the AT device
- Buying or leasing the AT device
- Coordinating different services needed to help the person use the AT device
- Using an AT device as part of physical or mental therapy
- Designing and making an AT device
- Fitting and adapting the AT device to the person's needs
- Maintaining, repairing, or replacing the AT device

What are the benefits of using AT?

AT can help a person with disabilities:

- Live as full and independent a life as possible
- Move around home and community more easily
- Communicate better
- Be more successful at work or school

How do I find the right AT device for me?

Many people find it helpful to first speak with their family doctor about AT. Your doctor may send you to other medical specialists to talk about your needs and which is the best device for you. If the device is for your child to use at school, talk to his or her teacher. Use these questions as a guide:

- What needs am I trying to meet using an AT device? Do I need it to get around the house, communicate with others, or do better in school?
- Is there a device that I can use on my own that will help meet my needs? Or, will I need someone to help me use it?
- Where will I use this device - at home, work, school, or in the community?

- Can my home or workplace support the technology needed to use this device?
- Will I often need to move the device to different places? If yes, is it light weight and easy to move?

How do I find out more about the device?

Ask your health insurance plan for a list of dealers who sell or lease AT devices. Talk to at least two dealers that sell the type of AT device you want. Ask them:

- Will I be able to try the device before I buy it?
- Will someone train me in how to use and maintain the device?
- How long is the device expected to last?
- Can changes be made to the device if my condition changes?
- What signs will tell me if my device is no longer working the way it needs to?
- How do I maintain the device?
- What should I plan on spending to maintain the device?
- Are there places that will help me pay for these costs?
- Is there a written warranty with the device? Are there limits to the warranty?
- Will the dealer repair my device at the store, or will it need to be sent out?
- If repairs cannot be made right away, will the dealer loan me a device?

How do I pay for the device?

- Find out if your health insurance will pay for all or some of the cost. You may have health insurance through Medicare, AHCCCS (Arizona Medicaid), or a private plan.
- If your plan does not pay, there may be groups in your community that will help pay for the device. One example of a community group that may help pay for the device is the Arizona Bridge to Independent Living (ABIL).

How do I work with my health plan to get my device?

- Stay in contact with your plan. Let them know you want to be kept up to date about the approval process.

- Talk with staff about any problems when they come up. Do not wait until your request has been denied.
- Listen to what the staff has to say.
- Let the staff know when you feel they are doing a good job.

What can I do if there are problems getting my device?

Sometimes people have problems getting their device. Their health plan may:

- Deny their request
- Not cover all the costs of the device
- Not give the person the type of device he or she asked for

If your request is denied, you have certain rights under the law. You can:

- Ask for a letter that tells you why your request was denied.
- Ask to have any part of the letter or your medical records explained to you.
- Appeal the decision. Find out about the plan's appeals process and file an appeal.

If you have problems getting your device, it's a good idea to stay organized and track communication with your health plan. You can:

- Keep all important papers about your AT in a safe place, such as a notebook or file.
- Keep track of important appeal deadlines. These are the dates when you need to file your appeal.
- Keep copies of all letters you have written and other information sent to the health plan on your behalf.
- Keep your only copy of important papers. Do not give to others.
- Write down what you want to say and any questions you have before meeting with health plan staff.
- Take notes during meetings with staff. Ask for copies of all papers shared at the meetings.
- Make a note of the date, time and the person you spoke with during phone calls to the agency. Write down what you talked about.
- Make a list of people who understand your needs and believe the device will help you. The list might include doctors, teachers, and family members.

This is too hard, should I give up?

No, don't give up. Here are some things you can do:

- Keep asking for help until you get help.
- If you call someone for help, but they don't call back, call them again.
- Go to the next person in charge if you don't get the help you need from the first person you talked to.
- Be polite and firm when you ask for help or share your thoughts.
- Ask someone who understands your needs to go to meetings with you.
- Ask someone who understands your needs to write a letter of support (see pages 23-25 for sample letters of medical necessity).
- Contact the Arizona Center for Disability Law or other groups listed on pages 11-22 for help and advice.

Are there programs and laws that support the use of AT devices and services?

Yes. There are a number of federal and state programs and laws that support the use of AT devices and services. These programs and laws are listed below. They are divided into sections on Work, General Living, School, and Healthcare:

Work

Vocational Rehabilitation, also called VR – This is a program that helps people with disabilities get and keep a job. VR staff can help you figure out what AT device you might need to be successful at a certain job. The program also may help pay for the device. You must have a disability and be trying to get or keep a job to take part in this program. To contact your local VR office, call **1-800-563-1221** or **TTY 1-855-475-8194**. You can find information about VR online at **www.azdes.gov/rsa/VR**.

Social Security Administration, also called SSA - The SSA has programs to help people with disabilities pay for and get AT.

- **Plan for Achieving Self Support, also called PASS** - This program allows people with disabilities to use their Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to buy AT that helps them meet a work-related goal. To learn more about this program, contact your local Social Security office. Call **1-800-772-1213** to find your local office.

- Ticket to Work – This program helps people with disabilities find and keep a good job. It helps them save money and be more independent. For more information on the Ticket to Work program, call the groups listed below.

Group Name	Contact Information
Arizona Bridge to Independent Living (ABIL) - Serves people living in the Phoenix Metro Area	Phone: 602-443-0720 TTY: 602-443-0737 Email: WIPA@abil.org
DIRECT Center for Independence Serves people living in Tucson, Sierra Vista and Southern Arizona	Phone and TTY: 520-624-6452 Email: direct@directilc.org
New Horizons Independent Living Center – Serves people living in Northern Arizona	Phone and TTY: 928-772-1266 Email: Nhilc@cableone.net
SMILE Independent Living Center – Serves people living in Yuma and Southeastern Arizona	Phone: 928-329-6681 TTY: 928-782-7458 Email: Workincentives@smile-az.org

General Living

Independent Living Rehabilitation Services also called ILRS – Each state has a program to help people with disabilities live full and independent lives. One of the program’s goals is to help people find the right AT for them. Unlike VR, people looking for help from this program do not need to have a job-related goal. They may want help being able to function better in their home or community. The ILRS does not fund AT devices or services. For more information about this program, contact the groups listed in the table on pages 11-22.

School

There are three Federal laws that help ensure that children with disabilities get a free, public education. These laws may help children with disabilities get AT devices and services to help them do well in school.

- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, also called IDEA** – This law is often known as the special education law. It requires states and communities that get money from the federal government to provide a free public education for children with disabilities. For each child covered by the law, schools must do an IEP. An IEP, also called an individualized education plan, details what is needed to help the child succeed in school. The plan often includes the use of AT devices and services. Under this law, the school may be required to pay for your child’s AT device or service. To find out if your child can benefit from the IDEA, talk to your child’s teacher.
- **The Rehabilitation Act (Section 504)** - Students who can't get services under the IDEA may be able to get services under this law. It is often called “Section 504.” If a student meets the definition of a disabled person under Section 504, then he or she has the right to get and use AT devices and services. As part of this law, the school may be required to pay for your child’s AT device or service.

Also, this law does not allow students with disabilities to be unfairly separated from other students. If an assistive technology device can keep the child in a regular classroom, then the device would most likely be required under Section 504.

- **The Americans with Disabilities Act** - This law requires that private and public schools provide AT devices and services to students with disabilities. The law helps make sure that people with disabilities have physical access to their school. This means that they can get into and freely move around the school. The ADA applies to more than just schools. It is a civil rights law that protects people with disabilities at work, when accessing public services and buildings, when using public transportation, and when using the phone to communicate.

Healthcare

Arizona Medicaid, also called Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)

AHCCCS provides medical services through health maintenance organizations, also called HMOs. The HMO may pay for AT devices and services if:

- The AT device or service meets Arizona’s definition of durable medical equipment, prosthetics, and orthotics. See page 26 for definitions of these terms.
- The AT device or service is part of approved home health or skilled nursing care. This may include speech, physical or occupational therapy.
- Your doctor writes a letter saying that the device or service is “medically necessary” for your health. See pages 23-25 for sample letters of medical necessity.

AT devices are considered medically necessary if they:

1. Keep you from getting a disease, disability or other health problem. Or, keep your current health problems from getting worse.
2. Help you live longer.

To find out if your HMO will pay for AT devices and services, talk to your case manager.

Medicare

Medicare is a federal health insurance program. It pays for some medical equipment and services for people who are 65 and older. It also helps pay for medical equipment and services for adults who are younger than 65 and their children. These adults and children must have been getting Social Security Disability Insurance benefits or Adult Disabled Child benefits for at least 24 months.

Medicare will help pay for AT if it is medically necessary and meets Medicare’s definition of durable medical equipment. See page 26 for definitions.

To learn more about payment for AT devices and services, contact Medicare at **1-800-633-4227** or go online to **www.medicare.gov**.

Private Health Insurance

Some health insurance plans will help pay for AT devices or services if your doctor says they are medically necessary. Each insurance company has its own process for deciding what is a medical necessity. Check to see if your plan will help pay for AT devices and services.

Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)

The Division of Developmental Disabilities, also called DDD, oversees care and services for people with developmental disabilities. Examples of these disabilities include autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and epilepsy.

If a person can take part in this program, a case manager will assess the person's need for AT. The goal of the AT is to help the person be as independent as possible.

DDD may help you get and pay for the device. For more information about DDD, call **1-866-229-5553** or go online to www.azdes.gov/developmental_disabilities/.

Worker's Compensation

Each state has a worker's compensation program that protects people who get injured at work. It gives them cash benefits and pays for medical care they need as a result getting hurt. Benefits can include paying for AT.

What is a letter of medical necessity?

It is a letter your doctor or other health care provider writes saying why you need a certain AT device or service for your health. If you want your health plan to pay for the device, you must have a letter of medical necessity. A well-written letter may help speed up your request. It also may help make sure that the correct equipment is ordered. These letters make the case that using a certain AT device or service will:

1. Keep you from getting a disease, disability or other health problem. Or keep your current health problems from getting worse.
2. Help you live longer.

A strong letter includes:

- Your physical or mental problems that limit how well you function
- Your exact health condition, also called your diagnosis
- How long the doctor thinks your condition will last
- Health and other problems that may happen if you don't get the device or service you ask for
- How the equipment or service will benefit you. For example, explain how it might make it easier for you to stay in your own home, keep your job, be safe, and save money.

When asking for communication aids, the letter needs to include:

- Where and how the communication device will be used. For example, will it be used at home, work, school, in the community? It's important to provide clear and detailed information about how the device will be used.
- Examples of how you communicate now. Explain why this is not working for you and how the new device will help you communicate better. If you need a replacement device, explain how your current device helps you and why you need a replacement.
- How the device will improve your quality of life.

You will find samples of letters of medical necessity on pages 23-25.

What are “magic words” that can help me get the AT I need?

There are certain “magic words” that your doctor should use when writing your medical necessity letter. For example, if you need a wheelchair, your doctor can write a letter that explains why a wheelchair is “medically necessary” for your health. Putting certain terms in the letter such as “needed to remain in the home setting” may increase your chances of Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance paying for the wheelchair. Magic words for three programs that help pay for AT are listed below.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): Use words that describe how the AT will help you meet your job goals, such as “needed to achieve employment outcome” or “necessary to remain employed.”

Medicare: Use words such as “reasonable and necessary;” “needed to maintain and improve functional limitation;” “a prosthetic device;” or “needed to remain in the home setting.”

AHCCCS (Arizona Medicaid) and Private Insurance: Use words that describe how the AT will help treat the medical condition. Examples include: “necessary to correct mobility impairment;” “needed to alleviate the impact of the impairment or disability;” or “necessary to improve the functional limitations of the disability.”

Where can I get more information?

Contact the following groups for more information about AT.

Group name:

Arizona 2-1-1 Community Information and Referral Services

Phone:

2-1-1(within Arizona only)

Website:

www.211arizona.org. To find information about services near you, first click on your county. Then click on the disability-related services link.

Services:

This program provides links to agencies that provide assistive technology services within Arizona.

Group name:

Four County Conference on Developmental Disabilities

Phone:

928-778-3391

Address:

325 N. Arizona Avenue
Prescott, AZ 86301

Website:

www.yavapaikidsbook.org/agency-directory/littles-directory/item/four-county-conference-on-developmental-disabilities-3-2. (Please note: This is a temporary website location. A new website for the Four County Conference on Developmental Disabilities is coming.)

Email:

4ccdd@commspeed.net

Services:

This program serves as an advocate for adults and children with disabilities throughout Arizona. It helps people with disabilities find jobs, housing, and services in their communities. The group provides workshops on special education to help parents and teachers better understand IEP's (Individualized Education Plans). It also helps families connect with other families who are looking for training and education for people with disabilities.

Group Name:

Central Arizona Council on Developmental Disability

Phone:

480-982-5015

Address:

P.O. Box 3670
Apache Junction, AZ 85117

Website:

www.cacdd.org

Email:

dbaon@cacdd.org

Services:

This group helps people with physical and mental disabilities develop the skills they need to live independent lives. The Council provides services including:

- Help with personal care and hygiene, also called attendant care.
- Help keeping the home clean and safe, also called housekeeping services.
- Take over care of the person for a period of time to give the primary caregiver a break, also called respite care.
- Help people with disabilities learn, keep, or improve the skills they need for daily living. These services may include speech, physical, or occupational therapy.
- Transportation to and from needed services in the Apache Junction and Queen Creek area.
- Job training for people with mental and physical disabilities to help them get and keep a job. The Council runs a community-

- based recycling center that provides the job training.
 - Social activities such as dances, dinners and picnics.
-

Group name:

Arizona Department of Education – Exceptional Student Services (ESS)

Phone:

Phoenix office: 602-542-4013

Flagstaff office: 928-637-1860

Tucson office: 520-628-6330

Addresses:

Phoenix address:

3300 N. Central Avenue

24th Floor

Phoenix, AZ 85012

Flagstaff address:

3100 N. West Street

Suite 300

Flagstaff, AZ 86004

Tucson address:

400 W. Congress

Suite 241

Tucson, AZ 85701

Website:

www.azed.gov/special-education

Email:

ESSDesk@azed.gov

Services:

This program is part of the Arizona Department of Education. It works to make sure that public education agencies have special education programs that comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and that children with disabilities get a free public education. The program provides information to teachers and parents about special education and AT.

ESS staff works with school districts and charter schools to make sure they follow state and federal special education laws.

Group name:

Arizona Department of Education – Exceptional Student Services – Assistive Technology Team

Phone:

602-542-3852

Address:

1535 W. Jefferson Street, Bin 24
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Website:

www.azed.gov/special-education/assistive-technology

Email:

atinfo@azed.gov

Services:

The Assistive Technology section of the Arizona Department of Education helps local public education agencies; teachers and parents understand and use assistive technology devices. The program has a helpful AT resource guide for teachers on its website. It also runs an AT short-term loan library so that teachers and, in some cases, parents can check out different AT devices and practice using them.

Group name:

Arizona Division of Developmental Disabilities

Phone:

602-542-0419

Toll Free: 866-229-5553

Address:

P.O. Box 6123
1789 W. Jefferson Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85005

Website:

www.azdes.gov/ddd

Email:

DDDweb@azdes.gov or DDDHotline@azdes.gov

Services:

The Division of Developmental Disabilities or DDD is part of the Arizona Department of Economic Security. It provides support and services to over 32,000 people with developmental disabilities and their families in Arizona. Children and adults with developmental disabilities get services in their homes. These services are based on the person's needs, state and federal guidelines, and available funding. A case manager oversees the services and helps link the person to resources that best meet their needs.

Group name:

Raising Special Kids

Phone:

- Phoenix area: 602-242-4366
- Northern Arizona – Flagstaff: 928-444-8802
- Southern Arizona – Tucson: 520-441-4007
- Southern Arizona – Yuma: 928-444-8803
- **Toll Free: 800-237-3007**

Address:

5025 E. Washington Street
Suite #204
Phoenix, AZ 85034

Website:

www.raisingpecialkids.org

Email:

info@raisingpecialkids.org

Services:

This program provides support for and information to parents of children ages 0 to 26 with disabilities and special healthcare needs. The group:

- Helps parents get information about healthcare, community resources and support services so they can be effective advocates for their children.
 - Runs a parent-to-parent program that connects parents who have children with similar issues to one another for support and information.
 - Provides workshops to help parents understand the special education process.
 - Helps resolve problems between families and schools or other groups.
-

Group name:

Pilot Parents of Southern Arizona

Phone:

520-324-3150

Toll Free: 877-365-7220

Address:

2600 North Wyatt Drive

Tucson, AZ 85712

Website:

www.pilotparents.org

Email:

ppsa@pilotparents.org

Services:

Provide encouragement and support to families who have children with special needs. Services include:

- Peer to Peer Support – connects families to other families so they can provide each other with emotional support and practical information.
- Sibling Support – Also called “sibshops.” This program provides supports for brothers and sisters of children with disabilities.
- The Navigator – a newsletter that lets people know about upcoming trainings, events, and articles. It also provides update on local and state issues related to disabilities.

- Partners in Leadership – An advocacy training program for adults with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities who want to learn more about how to advocate for themselves.
 - Educational Support – Helps parents understand their rights and responsibilities under the ADA and IDEA laws.
 - LEAP – The Leadership Education Advocacy Program provides financial support for self-advocates and parents/guardians of children/adults with developmental disabilities to take part in trainings and conferences that will increase knowledge and self-advocacy skills.
-

Group name:

Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) part of the Arizona Rehabilitation Service

Phone:

Central Office: 602-542-3332

Toll Free: 800-563-1221

TTY: 855-475-8194

Call the central office or toll-free number to get contact information for the VR office nearest you.

Websites:

www.azdes.gov/rsa and www.azdes.gov/rsa/VR

Services:

This program provides services to people with disabilities to help them get and keep a job. You must first qualify to take part in the program.

This means that you:

- Have a documented disability
- Have problems getting or keeping a job
- Want a job
- Need VR services to get a job

Services include:

- Help learning about your job related needs
- Help finding and keeping a job
- Job training

- AT services and devices. For example, if your job requires you to type, but your disability means that you cannot type, the Arizona VR department may provide “talk to text” headsets.

Some services are provided at no cost.

Group name:

Arizona Center for Disability Law

Phone:

Phoenix: 602-274-6287 (Voice)

Toll Free: 800-927-2260

Tucson: 520-327-9547

TTY: 800-327-7754

Toll Free: 800-922-1447

Addresses:

Phoenix office:

5025 East Washington Street

Suite 202

Phoenix, AZ 85034-7439

Tucson office:

177 North Church Avenue

Suite 800

Tucson, AZ 85701-1119

Website:

www.azdisabilitylaw.org

Email:

center@azdisabilitylaw.org

Services:

The Center is the protection and advocacy (P&A) system for the state of Arizona. It advocates for the legal rights of people with disabilities. It works to keep people with disabilities free from abuse, neglect and discrimination. It also works to help make sure people with disabilities have access to education, healthcare, housing and jobs. Its goal is to help

these people be as independent as possible and have the same rights as people without disabilities.

You can find many helpful guides on the Center's website. They provide information about laws that protect and help people with disabilities; getting a job; fair housing; mental health; preventing abuse; special education; and legal options. You can download and print these guides at no cost.

Group name:

Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP)

Phone:

602-728-9534

TTY: 602-728-9536

Toll-Free: 800-477-9921

Address:

The Arizona Technology Access Program

Northern Arizona University

2400 N. Central Avenue

Suite 300

Phoenix, AZ 85004

Website:

www.aztap.org

Email:

askaztap@nau.edu

Services:

AzTAP is part of Northern Arizona University's Institute for Human Development. It helps people with disabilities find the AT they need to take part in activities that matter to them. The group works with people with disabilities of all ages, family members, service providers, employers, and the general public to help them know more about AT. Services include:

- Working with people to help them find and use the AT that best meets their needs
- Showing how different AT devices work (they have about 4,000 AT-related products)

- Lending out AT devices for short amounts of time
 - Providing loans to help people buy the technology they need
 - Providing training and education about AT
 - Running an online program that allows people to buy AT that has already been used by someone else
-

Group name:

Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
(also called Sonoran UCEDD)

Phone:

520-626-0442

Address:

Sonoran UCEDD
University of Arizona
P.O. box 245052
Tucson, AZ 85724

Website:

www.sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu

Email:

ucedd@email.arizona.edu

Services:

The goal is to make sure that people with developmental disabilities fully participate in their communities. The Center:

- Serves as a resource for people about education, research and services related to people with developmental disabilities
- Trains students and service professionals on developmental disabilities
- Conducts research on developmental disabilities
- Provides technical assistance and information on developmental disabilities to professionals and members of the public
- Gets out information about what works best for people with developmental disabilities

- Improves services for Hispanic/Latino people with developmental disabilities and their families, also to people living in rural and border areas
-

Group name:

The Institute for Human Development – Northern Arizona University. It is one of the Arizona Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

Phone:

928-523-4791

TTY: 928-523-1695

Address:

Institute for Human Development
P.O. Box 5630
Flagstaff, AZ 86011

Website:

www.nau.edu/ihd

Email:

ihd@nau.edu

Services:

The Institute is a research and training program. It works to connect the education and research resources of the University to the agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities. Services include:

- Undergraduate and graduate level courses on disabilities at Northern Arizona University
 - Programs that educate the public about developmental disabilities
 - Providing training and technical assistance to agencies and community members
 - Conducting research and evaluation of programs for people with developmental disabilities
-

Group name:

Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

Phone:

602-542-8970

Toll-Free: 877-665-3176

Address:

1740 West Adams Street

Suite 410

Phoenix, AZ 85007

Website:

www.azdes.gov/ADDPC

Email:

addpc@azdes.gov

Services:

The council has 23 members made up of people with developmental disabilities, family members of people with disabilities, and staff of state agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities. The goal of the council is to bring about change so that people with developmental disabilities are fully included in all parts of their communities. Services include:

- Creating a five year plan to address issues that affect people with developmental disabilities such as getting an education and finding and keeping a job.
 - Promoting self-advocacy for people with developmental disabilities
 - Getting information to members of the state legislature about developmental disabilities
-

Stories and Sample Letters of Medical Necessity

Story #1

Mike has a lot of health problems. He suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, and obesity. He has a manual wheelchair, but finds it hard to use because of his weight problem. His doctor thought a power wheelchair would help Mike get around more easily. Mike asked his doctor to write a letter to AHCCCS, Arizona Medicaid, asking them to pay for a power wheelchair.

Mike was upset to learn that his request was denied. He wanted advice about what to do. He talked to a staff member at the Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL). She suggested that he go back to the doctor and ask him to write a more detailed letter about Mike's needs. She also told Mike to talk with his health plan about getting a wheelchair evaluation.

Someone from the wheelchair company came to Mike's home and evaluated his need for a power wheelchair. He wrote a report stating why Mike needed the power wheelchair. Also, his doctor wrote a more detailed letter of medical necessity. After 5 months, Mike finally got his power wheelchair and life got a whole lot better.

Sample Letter of Medical Necessity #1

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is written in support of my patient, Mike Doe's request for a power wheelchair. Mr. Doe has been under my care for 8 years. He has a number of chronic illnesses including diabetes, hypertension, depression, and obesity.

For about a year, he has been unable to walk because of his weight gain. We have not been able to control his weight gain using medical approaches. Although Mr. Doe has a manual wheelchair, he cannot use it well because of his excess weight. This means that Mr. Doe cannot freely move around his home or use the bathroom.

It is my medical opinion that a power wheelchair is necessary to correct his mobility impairment. It will allow Mr. Doe to remain in the home setting, function independently, and safely meet his daily living needs. If he does not get a power wheelchair, his overall health status will get much worse and his life may be at risk.

If you need any further medical information, please contact me.

Sincerely Yours, Dr. Jones

Story #2

Anne has congestive heart failure and uses oxygen. She needs a walker to get around. A few years ago, she was mugged. Her shoulder was seriously hurt. She's been to the doctor many times, but her injury has not healed. She is in constant pain. Also, she has trouble using the walker because of her bad shoulder. Anne's doctor thought a motorized scooter would help. He wrote a letter to Medicare explaining why she needed the scooter.

Sample Letter of Medical Necessity #2

To Whom It May Concern:

Let this serve as a letter of medical necessity for Anne Smith and her request for a motorized scooter. It is my understanding that Ms. Smith has congestive heart failure and must use oxygen. I am not the doctor that treats her heart problem, but I have treated her right shoulder problems.

She was attacked a few years ago and her right shoulder was seriously injured. This shoulder fracture continues to cause her pain, limited function, and disability. I've examined her shoulder during four office visits over the last year.

At this time, her functional limitation is that of only 120 degrees of active flexion, about 90 degrees of abduction. She may have an underlying rotator cuff tear as well. We will do an MRI to see if this is the case.

She has pain when she tries to move her shoulder. Her pain is intense and real. She is using a walker at this time, but has great trouble doing that. It should be noted that in addition to her walker, Ms. Smith has tried very hard to use a manual wheelchair. But, because of the problems with her right shoulder, her pain, and her trouble breathing, she cannot use it a functional way.

It is my medical opinion that Ms. Smith will continue to have serious trouble with her right shoulder. She is not a good candidate for surgery at this time. It is clear that with her shortness of breath and inability to use her right shoulder well, that she is likely to be wheelchair bound on a permanent basis. Therefore, a motorized scooter is necessary to correct her mobility impairment.

Sincerely Yours,

Dr. Lane

Story #3

Marta is very worried about her son Brian. He's had asthma since he was a few months old. The family doesn't have much money and is on AHCCCS. They speak mostly Spanish at home. Marta finds it hard to talk with doctors about her son's needs. After visiting her local health clinic, the nurse practitioner told Marta that it might be possible to get a nebulizer to help with her son's asthma. She offered to write a letter to Marta's Medicaid HMO and request a nebulizer to help treat Brian's asthma.

Sample Letter of Medical Necessity #3

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing this letter of medical necessity on behalf of Brian Juarez. He is two years old and suffers from chronic asthma. Over the past two years, he has had 14 colds. He also has had three serious cases of pneumonia. Because of his age, he is unable to swallow pills or use an inhaler to take his medicine.

His mother takes him to the emergency room about 6 to 8 times a year. Each time, Brian is given a nebulizer treatment for his asthma. These treatments have proved effective and help calm Brian when he has a serious asthma attack. Having a nebulizer at home is medically necessary. It would allow him to get treatment at home and not have to make costly trips to the emergency room.

Please let me know if you need any more medical information about Brian's condition.

Sincerely yours,

Jane Doe
Nurse Practitioner

Defining hard-to-understand words

Developmental disability (pronounced dee-**vel**-uph-men-tuhl diss-uh-**bil**-e-tee) – a mental or physical disability, such as cerebral palsy or mental retardation, that is present at birth or childhood and lasts throughout a person’s lifetime.

Durable medical equipment (pronounced **dur**-uh-buhl **med**-uh-kuhl e-**kwip**-mint) – medical equipment that can be used more than one time, such as walkers, wheelchairs, or hospital beds. This type of equipment is used for people who have medical conditions or are sick or injured.

Medically necessary – (pronounced **med**-uh-kuhl-lee **ness**-uh-ser-ee) services and supplies provided by a doctor or other licensed health care provider that help:

- keep you from getting a disease, disability or other health problem
- keep your health problems from getting worse
- you live longer

Nebulizer – (pronounced **neb**-yuh-lye-zhur) equipment that delivers medicine in a mist form. People who have asthma and other lung problems use nebulizers. A doctor or other licensed health care provider must prescribe a nebulizer.

Orthotics – (pronounced or-**thot**-iks) devices that support weak or deformed body parts. Examples include leg, arm, and neck braces. Doctors or other licensed health care providers must prescribe these devices.

Prosthetic devices – (pronounced pross-**theht**-ik **duh**-vye-sez) are devices that replace missing parts of the body or parts of the body that don’t work well. Examples include artificial arms and legs. Doctors or other licensed health care providers must prescribe these devices.