

Assistive Technology Guide

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living

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How to Use this Guide

Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) were started in the late 1970s, to establish a non-residential center to support people with disabilities, live their independent lives. It took a while for this grassroots effort, known as the Independent Living Movement, to find its way into all 50 states and the US Commonwealth; but we are here, and we are a strong service!

Illinois was one of the first adaptors of the Independent Living Movement, in the early 1980's. Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) is one of the original five (5) CIL's in Illinois.

Fast forward 35-plus years and today, NICIL, as well as 21 other CIL's, continue to work hard every day to develop programming and services that support our consumers, in the five (5) county-NICIL territory which includes: Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, and Whiteside Counties. Our time is dedicated to serving all people with disabilities to live their independent lives, as they see fit. It is an honor and a privilege to serve!

Our services are tailored to each individual with whom we work. There are some common barriers which keep individuals from living independently. These barriers (or topics) are referred to in the industry as issue areas. There are nine (9) issue areas:

- Assistive Technology
- Attitudinal Barriers
- Communication
- Education
- Employment
- Healthcare Services
- Housing
- Physical Barriers
- Transportation

All NICIL staff are trained to be subject matter experts in these issue areas. Our team has developed issue-area guides to be available to our consumers, which are user friendly. These guides are designed to provide a basic understanding of the issue area, as well as to give information for self-direction. However, we want to be part of the process of independent living, so please, contact our team for one-on-one (individual) services.

Please use this guide to give you a helping hand in understanding the Assistive Technology issue area and use the resources provided as a starting point. When you are ready, know that we are here to support your independent living path.

Check out our website, www.nicil.org for access to all of our issue area guides. Contact the office at 815-625-7860 or via email at frontdesk@nicil.org to request for a copy to be emailed to you. Enjoy!

Introduction

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) supports people with disabilities to live their independent life, as they choose. Part of being independent includes being able to move about; go to doctor appointments, go shopping, go to school, and go visit family or friends. Unfortunately, sometimes, there are barriers to this independence, especially if you have a physical disability or limitation.

Technology is an important part of today's society; in the work place, professional athletics, medical advancement, and a plethora of other areas. Technology plays a crucial role in the independence of persons with disabilities, in a variety of ways. Whether it is a communication device to provide a voice to a person who cannot speak or a power wheelchair that provides mobility to someone who cannot walk, this technology is imperative to a person's ability to be independent. We term this assistive technology.

This issue area guide will help you to understand the basics of assistive technology, different types of assistive devices, and how to acquire an assistive technology device for you or a loved one. If you are not sure where to start, or you would like assistance learning how to use a new assistive device, contact NICIL! We would be happy to work with you one on one to provide the services you may need.

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Definitions

Assistive Technology - any device, software, or equipment that helps people work around their challenges

Assistive Technology

As defined, assistive technology (AT) is any device, software, or equipment that helps people work around their challenges. There are low-tech tools and high-tech tools that can help bridge a gap in ability, related to a specific disability. There are countless assistive technology devices available and new technology being developed every day. Some examples of assistive technology are:

- Cane or walker
- Power wheelchair
- Text to speech devices and applications
- Word prediction application
- Blind cane
- Applications to verbally describe a room or situation
- Screen reading software

With so many options available, it can be difficult to determine what assistive technology device would work best for you. Deciding the specific task for which you are needing assistance is one suggestion to narrow down your search for AT. For example, someone who is blind may need assistance getting around an unfamiliar environment. A probing cane can be used to help them determine if there are barriers in their path that they may not be able to see.

There are three different levels of assistive technology devices; low-tech, mid-tech, and high-tech devices. A low-tech device does not require a power source. These are tools that can be thought of as a “simple solution”. Sometimes people with arthritis have trouble gripping. A pencil grip or a pen that is thicker would be examples of low-tech devices that may make items easier to grasp. Mid-tech devices provide a specific function using limited power, such as a battery, to run. Examples include a calculator, communication device, or talking timer. High-tech devices, such as a power wheelchair or screen reader for the computer, are designed to help with minimal movement or mobility.

Funding Sources

Assistive technology comes in many forms to support many different disabilities in a variety of areas, such as employment and education. The unfortunate side of assistive technology is that there are not a lot of funding sources available to help people purchase these devices. Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance companies will provide some assistance in select assistive devices, but there are limitations, extensive application processes, and medical exams required before approval for devices.

Insurance

Similar to getting medication costs covered by insurance, you must first visit your doctor before insurance will cover assistive technology. Your doctor must write a prescription for the assistive technology that you are needing and may have to complete additional paperwork, before insurance can be billed. The prescription needs to include your name, the name of the item being requested, and the diagnosis or disability for which the assistive technology will be used. Medical documentation must also be submitted with the prescription, that proves how the assistive technology is necessary. Once the prescription order is complete, it can be submitted to a home-medical supply store which sells Durable Medical Equipment or Assistive Technology.

Loans

Unfortunately, not all assistive technology is covered by insurance, and you may have to pay out of pocket. A low-interest rate loan is one option to help cover some of the costs not provided by insurance. There are also resources available that let you borrow an assistive technology device for short-term use. If you would like more information on finding funding for assistive technology devices, please contact NICIL at 815-625-7860.

How NICIL Can Assist You

Looking for assistive technology can be overwhelming. NICIL can help you research and find assistive technology that may best fit your need. As part of our independent living program, NICIL can work with individuals in order to share how to use assistive technology. This could consist of helping someone with low vision learn to use JAWS screen reader on their computer or someone who is hard of hearing find an amplified phone.

NICIL has developed relationships with different community agencies, including Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP). "IATP's mission is to increase access to and the acquisition of Assistive Technology (AT) devices and services for individuals of all ages with disabilities." IATP offers a device loan program where individuals can borrow an assistive technology device for an average of five (5) weeks, free of charge.

If you would like more information on assistive technology, finding funding for assistive technology, or would like to learn to request and use an assistive technology device contact the NICIL office at 815-625-7860. We have a resource database and can help you with anything from finding affordable ramps for your home to amplified phone systems.

Resources

Assistive Technology for Learning: What You Need to Know at <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/assistive-technology/assistive-technologies-basics/assistive-technology-what-it-is-and-how-it-works>

Low Tech vs. High Tech, adaptABLEworld, at <http://adaptableworld.blogspot.com/2012/09/low-tech-vs-high-tech.html>

Illinois Assistive Technology Program at <https://www.iltech.org/>

Conclusion

NICIL's onsite accessibility assessment of businesses does have a fee. Please call us, and we would be happy to share our pricing schedule with you.

The NICIL team is ready to help you with choosing your most independent life, in any way we can. Our services for one-on-one sessions are free. Call us for your appointment; we will be waiting!

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