

**AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION DEVICE FUNDING FOR CHILDREN –  
WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW**  
**Prepared by the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania**

A child with a disability is entitled to get an evaluation and an augmentative communication device (speech generating device) from both Medical Assistance (when medically necessary) and from the school (when needed for a free appropriate public education, or FAPE). This fact sheet describes these entitlements and other funding sources for an evaluation and an augmentative communication device.

It is very important initially to get an evaluation by a licensed speech language pathologist who is knowledgeable about augmentative and alternative communication, who can trial different devices, and who can recommend an appropriate device.

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS INFORMATION IS NOT INTENDED TO BE LEGAL ADVICE APPLICABLE TO SPECIFIC FACTUAL SITUATIONS.**

**1. Private Health Insurance**

Private health insurance may or may not cover evaluations and augmentative communication devices. If there is coverage, private health insurance will usually require prior authorization. Prior authorization includes a determination that the item is medically necessary. You should contact the child's private health insurance to ask about coverage and prior authorization rules. The child would own any device paid for by private health insurance.

**2. Pennsylvania Medical Assistance (Medicaid)**

The doctor of a child with Pennsylvania Medical Assistance (Medicaid) may request prior authorization for an evaluation and an augmentative communication device from the Office of Medical Assistance Programs-Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (for ACCESS or ACCESS Plus) or the child's Medical Assistance managed care health plan. Prior authorization includes a determination that the item is medically necessary. Medical Assistance is secondary to any other health insurance that the child may have. Medical Assistance can cover the other health insurance deductibles, copayments, and coinsurances as well as items not covered by the other health insurance. Currently, Medical Assistance pays for a new device every three years; exceptions must be made when medically necessary, however.

**3. School-Based ACCESS Program**

The school, school district, or intermediate unit has the option to enroll as a Medical Assistance provider for the School-Based ACCESS Program. This enables the school, school district, or intermediate unit to provide IEP services for a child on Medical Assistance (ACCESS, ACCESS Plus, or Medical Assistance managed care health plan) and, with parental consent (authorized signature required) and medical authorization, get partial reimbursement from Medical Assistance via the Department of Public Welfare. Therefore, the school, school district, or intermediate unit can bill the School-Based ACCESS Program for an evaluation and an augmentative communication device

that is in the child's IEP. The child would own the device. You can find more information at <http://www.leaderservices.com/pa/manual.asp>.

#### **4. Restricted ACCESS Funds**

All reimbursements received by the school, school district, or intermediate unit from billing the School-Based ACCESS Program, as described above, must be put into an individual restricted account for that entity, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. These restricted ACCESS funds must be used for the special education program. You can ask the special education director how much funds are in this restricted account. Among other items, the school, school district, or intermediate unit may request a draw down of funds to purchase an augmentative communication device for a specific child receiving special education services. The school, school district, or intermediate unit would own the device. However, you can negotiate ownership, and many schools, school districts, and intermediate units do give device ownership to the child. The child's name or Medical Assistance number is not required to use these restricted ACCESS funds, and, in fact, the child does not need to have Medical Assistance to use this funding method. You can find more information at <http://www.leaderservices.com/pa/manual.asp>.

#### **5. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) Funds**

Finally, a school, school district, or intermediate unit may use its own special education funds through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) to pay for an evaluation and an augmentative communication device that is included in the child's IEP. The school, school district, or intermediate unit would own the device. However, the child's IEP team (which includes you as the parent) may determine that the child needs to have the device with him/her at home – on evenings, weekends, and school breaks – to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Please review the fact sheet called "Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities" at <http://www.drnpa.org/File/publications/assistive-technology-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf> for more information.

#### **6. Private Pay**

Finally, out of pocket payment may be made for an evaluation and an augmentative communication device.

NOTE: Any augmentative communication device, regardless of the funding source, can be incorporated into the child's IEP when it is needed for a free appropriate public education (FAPE). You can make this request in writing to the child's IEP team.

#### **Who can I contact for help?**

If you have questions or need help, please contact the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TTY). The mission of the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities.