



Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities and Older People

November 2016

Our Vision for Assistive Technology

A society where everyone with a disability or disabling condition and older people, has access to affordable, up to date and appropriate technology that suits their needs. Technology may be mainstream or specialised, but ultimately supports the individual to exercise their human right to self-determination, freedom of movement and participation.

Introduction

The population of people with disabilities and older people is growing and technology is also developing at a great speed. Assistive Technology, when used appropriately, has the potential to support people with disabilities and older people to exercise their human rights and become more active members of society. The Disability Federation of Ireland and Enable Ireland share a concern that current service provision for Assistive Technology is fragmented and under-resourced to meet these emerging changes. We have produced this discussion paper to prompt action on a more comprehensive Assistive Technology service. We lay out both immediate and longer term recommendations to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities and older people in Irish society.

Assistive Technology is: *“any item, piece of equipment or product system whether acquired commercially, modified or customized that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities” (World Health Organisation & World Bank 2011, p.101).*

“Having Assistive Technology has allowed me to be the person I want to be and take control of my life” (Linda, living independently)



We Need to Focus on Assistive Technology because:

Ireland has an underdeveloped Assistive Technology infrastructure in comparison with other countries (NDA 2012). Services here are fragmented and inconsistent. An appropriate and effective Assistive Technology service could provide a significant return on investment for both the State and the Assistive Technology user. It could also help to address gaps in the implementation of many government policies that aim to support citizens to participate fully in Irish society.



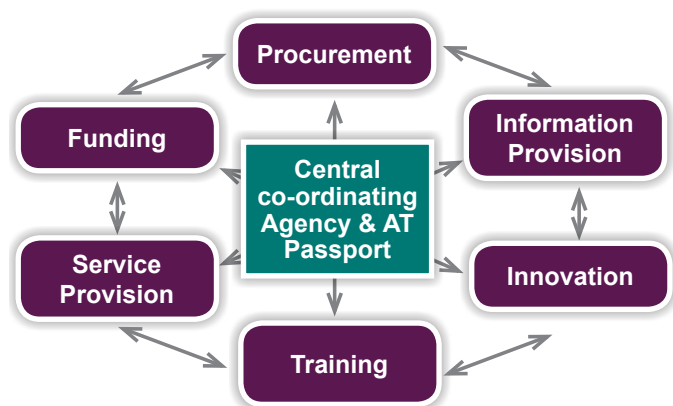
*Rag Doll
No key to life
Tech is a husband
Not easy but important love
(Poem by Mairead Manton 2016)*

Assistive Technology can support people to access their human rights (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). It can also support them to access education and employment and live independently. It can support government to respond to population changes and provides greater value for money both in terms of better quality of life outcomes and cost savings.

“AT is a right not a luxury, AT enables me to contribute to the economy and to fulfil my employee role” (Aileen, university administrator)

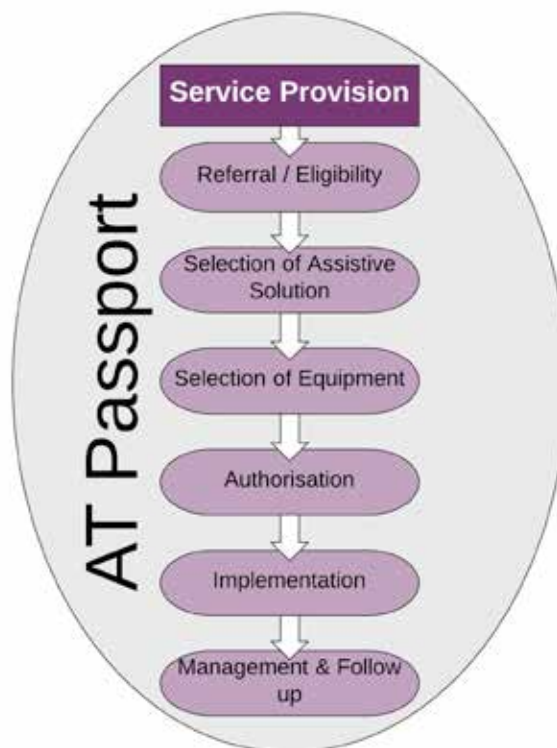
We Need

1. **A cross-Government Policy Statement** to guide the development of a comprehensive ecosystem of supports for Assistive Technology including the introduction of an Assistive Technology Passport.
2. **An Assistive Technology (AT) Passport** that can support Assistive Technology users to access the training and supports they need. This record is held and owned by the Assistive Technology user.
3. **A central coordinating agency** with responsibility for coordinating different aspects of a comprehensive service and drive training and innovation in Assistive Technology.



4. **Up to date information, advice and peer supports** using existing online information resources to respond to emerging technological developments and support interactive online forums and peer learning. This resource could also support training and form the basis for the development of a loan library for Assistive Technology. The Community Hub For Assistive Technology (CHAT), a national network of AT users, AT service providers, researchers and innovators, could also act as a model for information exchange and shared learning¹.

5. **Funding protocols with clear eligibility criteria.** Protocols need to respond to both the person's financial means and complexity of Assistive Technology solution, ranging from off the shelf items to highly individualised custom made solutions.
6. **A more comprehensive model for service provision based on international best practice.** The service requires a clear pathway including referral and establishment of eligibility for funding, selection of solution, trialling of Assistive Technology options, and selection of and training in the use of an appropriate AT solution.



7. **Investment in capacity raising amongst AT users and professionals. Development of research and innovation.** Training and peer mentoring are important for both AT users and professionals. User-centred research in technology design also needs to be developed.

1 Community Hub for Assistive technology (CHAT) is a community of practice run by DFI and Enable Ireland bringing together Assistive Technology users, service providers, makers, and researchers, designed to support shared learning: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8407996>



Stephen uses a head mouse to control his communication aid

For further information,

Disability Federation of Ireland

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www.disability-federation.ie

Enable Ireland

00353 1 2184100

www.enableireland.ie/at

References

National Disability Authority (2012) Research on the Provision of Assistive Technology in Ireland and other Countries to Support Independence living across the Life Cycle. NDA: Work Research Centre

World Health Organisation & World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva, CH; WHO

Front Cover: Jamie Patterson uses a communication device, environmental controls and is a power wheelchair user

Inside Image: Padhraic Dormer using Assistive Technology

Inside Image: Mairéad Manton uses a Communion device and Powered Wheelchair

Thank you to the many stakeholders who contributed to the development of this discussion paper.