ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FACTS

COMPUTER ACCESS

WHAT IS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY?

Assistive technology, or AT, is any tool that allows individuals with disabilities to use their unique abilities to reach their goals. AT can range from low-cost tools such as a jar opener to more complex devices such as a power wheelchair or communication aid. Infants, children, adults and older persons with any type of disability can benefit from the use of AT.

What is computer access AT?

It improves access to computers by facilitating input or enhancing output. Input interfaces are devices or software systems that provide an alternate means to control the computer. Output devices provide alternate access to information available from the monitor or printer.

Who is able to benefit from computer access devices?

A computer can provide access to social interaction, shopping, activities and information. This category of AT will benefit anyone who has difficulty interacting with a computer because of sensory, motor or cognitive limitations.

Where can I purchase computer access equipment?

It can be purchased through electronics and computer stores as well as through companies that specialize in this type of technology. While it may be tempting to select an AT device from a catalog or TV commercial, this is unwise. It is important to find a device with features that match the user's needs, and this can only be done with the help of a professional with sufficient expertise. Following an evaluation, it is likely that a device will be recommended for trial use.

If I have a computer, how can I use it better?

All computers have a base software called an Operating System, or OS. Common ones are Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X and Chrome OS. These operating systems have many access features built into the software. Accessibility settings can make the computer easier to use, see and hear by combining some of these features. Each manufacturer has a website dedicated to helping individuals to better use these technologies.

Do I need to add something to a standard computer?

If the built-in accessibility features are not sufficient, or you cannot use a standard keyboard or mouse, you
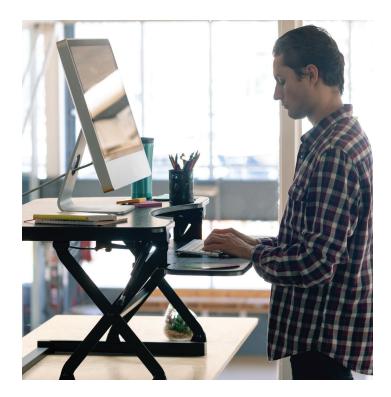
may need to purchase additional software or hardware.

For those with visual limitations, access can be made possible by hardware- or software-based screen magnification, by screenreading devices that convert visual information on the monitor into speech output, or by devices that convert information into Braille. Those who have difficulty with input using the keyboard and mouse have many options available to them: enlarged or miniaturized keyboards, reconfigured keyboards, modified mice, track-balls, joysticks, head or eye-gaze controllers, speech input and switch-activated scanning arrays.

What are some things I should consider before making an equipment purchase?

✦ Do I need help inputting information, receiving output or both?

✦ For what tasks do I want to use a computer?

✦ Can I use my computer's built-in accessibility features or do I need to add more?

✦ What financial resources can I access?