

Navigating the Financial Landscape: Building Durable Funding Pathways for Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) can significantly enhance the lives of disabled people, but its potential remains untapped for many due to barriers in funding. My research underscores the pivotal role of durable funding pathways in enabling AT adoption and sustained use.

In Residential Care Settings (RCSs), financial pathways encompass the processes by which funding is sourced, allocated, and managed to support AT. From initial acquisition to long-term maintenance, these pathways are often fragmented, complex, and inaccessible, leaving many disabled people and support organisations struggling to secure the resources needed to make technology a viable solution. Critically, these challenges highlight the need to address both up-front costs—such as purchasing devices—and ongoing costs, such as subscriptions for software or streaming platforms, that give the technology its continued usefulness.

The Problem: Fragmentation and Inequity

Interviews with AT professionals and users revealed systemic issues in the funding landscape. For disabled people living in RCSs, the absence of targeted funding programs for smart home technologies or advanced assistive devices poses significant challenges. One user described their frustration with navigating countless funding sources to purchase a suitable wheelchair and integrate it into their personally purchased smart home ecosystem.

These challenges are compounded by the difficulty of securing funds for ongoing costs, such as software updates, maintenance, and subscription models that enable the full functionality of many devices. For instance, a wheelchair with advanced navigation features or a smart home hub requires ongoing investment to retain its utility—yet many funding programs focus exclusively on the initial purchase, leaving users and organisations to grapple with sustainability gaps.

Organisational leaders also face barriers. Many cited a lack of knowledge about available funding sources as a reason for failing to invest in AT for the people they support. The administrative burden of identifying,

applying for, and managing multiple funding streams often fell to overstretched staff with neither the expertise nor the time to navigate these processes effectively.

In the United Kingdom, programs like Access to Work and the Disabled Student Allowance provide targeted funding for specific groups, but their scope excludes many disabled people in RCSs. Moreover, the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), while theoretically available, often falls short in both coverage and accessibility, leaving users without the necessary resources for timely technology adoption and sustained functionality.

Why Timing and Scope Matter

Delays in funding have profound implications for AT adoption. Research participants repeatedly stressed that prolonged wait times between identifying a technology need and securing the funds to purchase it diminish the likelihood of successful implementation. By the time resources become available, the momentum for integrating technology into daily life may already be lost.

Additionally, gaps in funding for ongoing costs often result in devices becoming obsolete or underutilized. Without the resources to cover updates, subscriptions, or repairs, technology that was initially celebrated for its potential can quickly fall out of use.

Evidence for Change

Data from focus groups and interviews revealed that organisations equipped with experienced fundraisers and grant writers were better able to secure resources for AT. These professionals not only streamlined access to existing funding pools but also supported disabled people in advocating for resources aligned with their support plans. Importantly, organisations that considered both up-front and ongoing costs in their funding strategies reported greater long-term success in maintaining AT as a viable solution.

Leadership played a key role in these successes. When organisations invested in training leaders to understand and navigate funding systems, they reported greater success in integrating AT into their services.

Leaders who proactively addressed the full lifecycle of AT costs created a more sustainable foundation for technology use.

Solutions for Sustainable Funding

Creating durable funding pathways requires simplifying access to resources and ensuring equity in distribution. Addressing both up-front and ongoing costs is essential to this process. Key steps include:

Establishing Comprehensive Funding Models: Advocate for funding programs that recognize the dual importance of initial purchases and the ongoing subscriptions or services that sustain AT utility.

Streamlining Funding Processes: Build partnerships with funders to simplify applications and reduce administrative burdens, ensuring that both acquisition and maintenance costs are prioritized.

Promoting Equity in Access: Expand programs like PIP and Access to Work to include disabled people in RCSs and cover a broader range of expenses, including subscriptions, updates, and repairs.

Investing in Knowledge and Leadership: Train organisational leaders and staff to understand funding systems and champion AT adoption, ensuring they can advocate for comprehensive financial pathways.

Through my research with Leonard Cheshire, I've seen firsthand the transformative impact of addressing funding challenges. By creating pathways that are durable, equitable, and accessible—and that address the full lifecycle of technology costs—we can ensure that AT reaches the people who need it most, enabling them to live more independent and empowered lives.

Julie Eshleman, Ph.D.

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