

A Guide to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia Revised: January, 2013

Age 0 – 6 Years

Primary Services:

Speech-language, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy services are delivered to children with disabilities and their families through the health system. Services are covered under the provincial health care program.

- **Child Development Centres** - This link refers to Child Development Centres (CDCs) in Metro-Vancouver www.centreforchilddevelopment.ca , including the Centre for Ability in Vancouver, www.centreforability.bc.ca. These centres provide services for preschoolers with significant motor and/or speech impairments. There are many other CDCs in other areas of the province, www.childdevelopment.ca/bc.aspx
- **BC Provincial Health Units, Municipal Health Departments, or Hospitals** - Depending on the region, health services may be provided through a provincial health unit, a municipal health department, or a hospital. www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html
www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/

Therapists employed by health units, hospitals and/or child development centres have varying degrees of expertise in AAC. Time available for AAC intervention may also vary from location to location.

- **Private Practitioners** - Several therapists located around the province have private practices for therapy services that may include AAC strategies. Families pay for this service separately as it is outside of the government health funding. For a listing of these practitioners, see the professional therapy organization for speech-language pathologists: www.bcaslpa.ca/, or occupational therapists www.bcsot.org/.

Tertiary /Specialized Services:

- **Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children (SHHC)** - Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children is a provincial facility offering specialized services to children with disabilities, their families and communities throughout British Columbia. Services are delivered close to home in a child's community, or on site at Sunny Hill, located in Vancouver. One of the teams operating at SHHC is the *Assistive Technology Team*. This team of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and occupational therapists (OTs) provides professional partnership and support to local community professionals working at child development centres, community health units, and schools. The team provides assessment and support for children aged 0-19 years in regards to technology for communication, learning,

Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

mobility, and environmental control.

www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/default.htm

Funding Assistance for AAC Technology:

- **“I Can Talk Too” Program** - Administered through Sunny Hill's Assistive Technology Team, the "I Can Talk Too" program provides funding for the loan, maintenance and upgrading of assistive technology equipment for preschool-aged children throughout British Columbia. This program is generously supported by charitable donations, primarily from the BC Children's Hospital Foundation. Following appropriate assessment, applications for the "I Can Talk Too" program are completed and submitted by the Speech-Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists on Sunny Hill's Assistive Technology Team. To qualify for funding for assistive technology equipment through the “I Can Talk Too” program, the child must: (1) be a resident of British Columbia, (2) be preschool-aged (i.e., 0-5 years old), (3) be served by a community team, and (4) have a current doctor's referral to Sunny Hill's Assistive Technology Team.
www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/TeamsServices/AssistiveTechnology/default.htm
- **At Home Program** – This funding program of the BC Ministry of Children & Families provides support to families of children with disabilities from 0 – 19 years. The At Home program provides financial assistance for services and equipment. However, the program specifically excludes AAC devices.
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home/
- **Private Extended Insurance Benefits** - Some insurance programs include speech-language pathology or occupational therapy services that may include augmentative communication strategies. Some programs may also cover the cost, or cost share, for equipment required. A complete list of private insurers may be found at :
www.assuris.ca/Client/Assuris/Assuris_LP4W_LND_WebStation.nsf/page/Member+Companies!OpenDocument&audience=policyholder
- **Fund-raising efforts on an individual basis** - Many individuals rely on creative ways to raise funds for specific AAC equipment that meets their child's needs. Bake sales, car washes, garage sales, etc. are common fund-raising methods.
- **Community Based Organizations** - The following organizations may be able to offer some financial support towards the purchase of AAC equipment: Kinsmen Foundation, Lion's Club, Rotary Club, Legions, religious groups, or local First Nations Bands.

Age 6 – 19 Years

Primary Services:

- **Education System** - BC is divided into many school districts and includes both public and private institutions. Some districts have speech-language pathologists

Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

and/or occupational therapists who may address the student's communication needs. Due to the complex and time-intensive demands of AAC intervention, some school districts in BC have engaged AAC specialists to ensure service to this population.

www.gov.bc.ca/bced/

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- **Community Health Units or Hospitals** – Occupational therapy and physiotherapy services are delivered to children with disabilities and their parents through the health system. Depending on the region, some of these centres provide services for school aged children.
www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html
www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/

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- **Private Practitioners** - Several therapists located around the province have private practices for therapy services that may include AAC strategies. Families pay for this service separately, as it is outside of the government health funding. For a listing of these practitioners see the professional therapy organization for speech-language pathologists: www.bcaslpa.ca/, or occupational therapists www.bcsot.org/.

Tertiary /Specialized Services:

- **Special Education Technology – British Columbia (SET-BC)** – SET-BC is a Ministry of Education Provincial Resource Program which provides assistive technology services to school districts for students with physical disabilities, visual impairments and autism. SET-BC lends assistive technologies (reading, writing, and communication tools) to ensure students' access to educational programs, and assists school districts in providing the necessary training for students and educators in the use of these technologies. www.setbc.org/
- **Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children (SHHC)** - Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children is a provincial facility offering specialized services to children with disabilities, their families and communities throughout British Columbia. Services are delivered close to home in a child's community, or on site at Sunny Hill, located in Vancouver. One of the teams operating at SHHC is the *Assistive Technology Team*. This team of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and occupational therapists (OTs) provides professional partnership and support to local community professionals working at child development centres, community

Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

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www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/default.htm

Funding Assistance for AAC Technology:

- **At Home Program** – This funding program of the BC Ministry of Children & Families provides support to families of children with disabilities from 0 – 19 years. The At Home program provides financial assistance for services and equipment. However, the program specifically excludes AAC devices.
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at_home/
- **Private Extended Insurance Benefits** - Some insurance programs include speech-language pathology or occupational therapy services that may include augmentative communication strategies. Some programs may also cover the cost, or cost share, for equipment required. A complete list of private insurers may be found at :
www.assuris.ca/Client/Assuris/Assuris_LP4W_LND_WebStation.nsf/page/Member+Companies!OpenDocument&audience=policyholder
- **Fund-raising efforts on an individual basis** - Many individuals rely on creative ways to raise funds for specific AAC equipment that meets their child's needs. Bake sales, car washes, garage sales, etc. are common fund-raising methods.
- **Community Based Organizations** - The following organizations may be able to offer some financial support towards the purchase of AAC equipment: Kinsmen Foundation, Lion's Club, Rotary Club, Legions, religious groups, or local First Nations Bands.

Age 20 – 99 Years

Primary Services:

- **Acute Care Hospitals & Public Health Units** – Many of these centres have speech-language pathologists and/or occupational therapists on staff to address communication issues. Within the Public Health Unit there are two programs that provide for community based services: the Continuing Care Program; and the Health Services for Community Living (HSCL) Program.
www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/

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- **Specialized Long-Term Care** - These centres may have speech-language pathologists and/or occupational therapists who address communication issues. George Pearson Centre in Vancouver is one such residence:

Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

www.vch.ca/locations_and_services/find_health_services/residential_care/vancouver_residential_care/george_pearson_centre/

- **Regional Resource for Adults with Disabilities (RRAD)** - RRAD is an interdisciplinary program that promotes the abilities and independence of adults with complex disabilities. It provides a range of specialized interventions and services for individuals who live in the South Vancouver Island Health Authority region. The telephone number is 250-388-2348. www.viha.ca/hcc/services/
- **Private Practitioners** - Several therapists located around the province have private practices for therapy services that may include AAC strategies. Families pay for this service separately, as it is outside of the government health funding. For a listing of these practitioners see the professional therapy organization for speech-language pathologists: www.bcaslpa.ca/, or occupational therapists www.bcsot.org/.

Tertiary /Specialized Services:

- **G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre** - This is the major rehabilitation centre for British Columbia. It serves individuals ages 14 and over, through a variety of etiology-based programs. Individuals who meet the admission criteria and require AAC intervention are seen by a multidisciplinary team and are followed through outreach liaison in their home community. Demand for services is high and waitlists can be long (6 weeks to 6 months). Consultative and support services are provided to SLPs and OTs working with AAC clients in all types of publicly funded health organizations. www.vch.ca/gfstrong/
- **Assistive Technology and Seating Service (ATSS)** – located at the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre, ATSS provides community clinicians with consultations, information, education, and equipment loans for assessment. ATSS also helps clinicians navigate through various government, insurance, and charitable resources. www.assistive-technology.ca
- **Assistive Technology – British Columbia (AT- BC)** - AT-BC provides long-term loans of technology to post-secondary students with sensory, motor, physical, or learning disabilities. They must be attending recognized degree/diploma programs and have an established educational plan. The mandate of the program is to provide students with a “level playing field” in terms of access to the curriculum and educational services. Equipment is returned to AT-BC when the education program is complete, but may be purchased by the student through a buy-out program (often at a depreciated value). www.at-bc.ca
- **Communication Assistance for Youth & Adults (CAYA)** – CAYA is a Provincial Resource Program that supports adults 19 years of age and older who require augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) assistance. The goal of CAYA is to ensure that eligible individuals have access to the communication tools and professional support to enable them to create an adult life. CAYA receives ongoing funding from the Ministry of Social Development. Services

Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

provided include professional assessment, equipment trials, long term equipment loans, training, follow up and technical support. www.cayabc.org/

Funding Assistance for Purchasing AAC Technology:

There are a number of community service organizations that support individuals with disabilities. These organizations may know of funding opportunities for AAC equipment.

- **ALS Society** – This society provides services to individuals with ALS in BC. Services include counseling, financial support for travel for medical needs, and AAC devices. The ALS Society generally relies on recommendations from the speech-language pathologists of GF Strong's ALS team. The ALS Society relies primarily on donations and volunteer time with little government assistance. Its inventory of AAC devices is limited and ALS clients in BC may not get the technology and services they require, particularly in the area of AAC. ALS Society contracts with TIL (Technology for Independent Living) to repair their AAC devices. www.als.ca/
- **Private Extended Insurance Benefits** - Some insurance programs include speech-language pathology or occupational therapy services that may include augmentative communication strategies. Some programs may also cover the cost, or cost share, for equipment required. A complete list of private insurers may be found at :
www.assuris.ca/Client/Assuris/Assuris_LP4W_LND_WebStation.nsf/page/Member+Companies!OpenDocument&audience=policyholder
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