A Guide to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia Revised - May, 2018

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** - There are many CDCs (Child Development Centres) in the province, [www.childdevelopment.ca/bc.aspx](http://www.childdevelopment.ca/bc.aspx). Two in the Lower Mainland are The Centre for Child Development [www.the-centre.org](http://www.the-centre.org) and the BC Centre for Ability, [www.bc-cfa.org](http://www.bc-cfa.org). These centres provide services for preschoolers with significant motor and/or speech impairments.

- **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](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html) [www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/](http://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.speechandhearingbc.ca/](http://www.speechandhearingbc.ca/) or occupational therapists [www.caot.ca/caot-bc/](http://www.caot.ca/caot-bc/).

**Tertiary /Specialized Services:**

- **Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children (SHHC)** - is a provincial facility that provides specialized development and rehabilitation services for children, youth (0 – 19 years) and their families, throughout BC. The Assistive Technology Team, comprised of speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, rehabilitation engineers and educators, sees children with severe speech and writing needs, and works with the child, family and community to plan the best assistive technology solution. The team provides assessment and support in regards to technology for communication, learning, mobility, and environmental control. [http://www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/sunny-hill-health-centre](http://www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/sunny-hill-health-centre)

- SHHC is currently under redevelopment and will be relocating to new space on the campus of BC Children’s Hospital in 2019.
Funding Assistance for AAC Technology:

- **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

- **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.

- **Fund-raising efforts on an individual basis** - Many individuals rely on creative ways to raise funds for specific AAC equipment that meets their preschool child’s needs. Bake sales, car washes, garage sales, etc. are common fund-raising methods.

- **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. Historically, the program has not funded AAC devices. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/healthy-women-children/child-behaviour-development/special-needs/complex-health-needs/at-home-program

- **“I Can Talk Too” Program** – Provided assistive technology equipment for preschool-aged children throughout British Columbia until December 2014. It was funded by charitable donations and has ceased to exist since that time.

**Age 6 – 19 Years**

*Primary Services:*

- **Education System** - BC is divided into many school districts and includes both public and private institutions. Most districts have speech-language pathologists who address 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. Please contact your school SLP for more information. www.gov.bc.ca/bced/

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Mainland are The Centre for Child Development [www.the-centre.org](http://www.the-centre.org) and the BC Centre for Ability, [www.bc-cfa.org](http://www.bc-cfa.org). Some of these centres provide services for school aged children with significant motor and speech impairments. Often these services are contracted through the school district.

- **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](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html) [www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/](http://www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/)

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**Tertiary /Specialized Services:**

- **Special Education Technology – British Columbia (SET-BC)** – SET-BC is a BC Ministry of Education Provincial Resource Program established to assist BC school districts and Group I and II Independent Schools in educating students who require or would benefit from using technology to access their educational programs. SET-BC services to school districts include consultation and collaboration; Professional Development and training; classroom and student resources; and technology loans of participation, communication and learning tools. [www.setbc.org](http://www.setbc.org)

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Age 19 – 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/

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

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: http://www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res_id=33

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. http://sci-bc-database.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Regional-Resource-for-Adults-with-Disabilities-Victoria.pdf
Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

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**Tertiary /Specialized Services:**

- **G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre** - GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre (GFS) is British Columbia's largest rehabilitation centre. GFS provides inpatient and outpatient outreach and clinical support services to clients ages 14 and over, through a variety of population-based programs i.e. Acquired Brain Injury, Spinal Cord Injury and Neuromusculoskeletal. Individuals who meet the admission criteria and require AAC intervention are seen by the interprofessional team and are referred to CAYA upon discharge. Demand for services at GFS is high and waitlists can be long (6 weeks to 6 months). [http://www.vch.ca/locations-and-services/find-locations/find-locations?site_id=73](http://www.vch.ca/locations-and-services/find-locations/find-locations?site_id=73)

- **Assistive Technology Service (ATS)** – located at the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre, ATS supports clinicians and rehabilitation professionals working with adults and adolescents with disabilities in the public health system of British Columbia and the Yukon. Support is provided in the form of: consultation, assessment, evaluation, intervention, and equipment trials. The service consults with and supports a client team in the assessment, selection, and application of technology to further an individual’s goals related to communication, vocation, education, leisure, and independent living. The service maintains a selection of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, environmental control systems, and accessibility devices for demo/trial. Focus areas include: AAC, computer access, custom adaptations, device mounting, environmental control systems, and mobile device access. [www.assistive-technology.ca](http://www.assistive-technology.ca)

- **ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) Centre** – located at the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre, it is an outreach provincial resource team that provides ongoing assessment, intervention, consultation and educational services to people with ALS in BC. [http://www.vch.ca/locations-and-services/find-health-services/?program_id=952](http://www.vch.ca/locations-and-services/find-health-services/?program_id=952)

- **Assistive Technology – British Columbia (AT- BC)** - AT-BC provides assistive technology resources to make learning and working environments usable for people with disabilities. There are two programs, ATBC For School and ATBC For Work. [www.at-bc.ca](http://www.at-bc.ca)

- **Communication Assistance for Youth & Adults (CAYA)** – CAYA is a province wide 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 & Poverty
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Reduction. Services 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:**

The majority of adults (19 to 99 years) who require AAC technology in BC now receive it on a long term/indefinite loan basis from CAYA. Funding for CAYA’s AAC technology comes from the Government of BC through the Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction and the ALS Society of BC. For individuals who do not wish to participate in CAYA’s services or loan equipment, there are a number of potential options.

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