

# A Guide to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia Revised: May 2009

## 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.

- **The BC Centre for Child Development** - [www.centreforchilddevelopment.ca](http://www.centreforchilddevelopment.ca)  
This link refers to Child Development Centres (CDCs) in Metro-Vancouver, including the Centre for Ability in Vancouver. [www.centreforability.bc.ca](http://www.centreforability.bc.ca) 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.bcaslpa.bc.ca/](http://www.bcaslpa.bc.ca/), or occupational therapists [www.bcsot.org/](http://www.bcsot.org/).

### **Tertiary /Specialized Services:**

- **Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children (SHHC)** - Sunny Hill is part of the Children's & Women's Health Centre of BC. It provides specialized developmental assessment and consultation to children with disabilities, as well as rehabilitation services to some specific pediatric populations (e.g. pediatric brain injury). One of the teams operating at SHHC is the *Assistive Technology Team*. This team of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and occupational therapists (OTs) provide professional partnership and support to local community professionals working at child development centres, and community health units. The team provides assessment and support for children in regards to technology for communication, learning, mobility, and environmental control.  
[www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/default.htm](http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/default.htm)

## Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

### *Funding Assistance for AAC Technology*

- **“I Can Talk Too” Program** - This funding program, supported by the Children’s Foundation, provides AAC technology to children. Technology requests are only received from members of Sunny Hill’s Assistive Technology Team (ATT), following appropriate assessment. The program has an annual budget limit and requests may be delayed if there is insufficient funding. The age range for provision is 0 – 19 years. All applications are subject to review to determine that they are not eligible for funding from other sources such as SET-BC (see below). Devices are provided to families on a long-term loan basis. Most repairs and maintenance costs are covered by the program, and servicing is facilitated through Sunny Hill’s ATT.  
[www.bchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/TeamsServices/AssistiveTechnology/default.htm](http://www.bchildrens.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/](http://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](http://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.

# Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

## Age 6 – 19 Years

### *Primary Services:*

- **Education System** - BC is divided into many school districts and includes both public and private institutions. Some of districts have speech-language pathologists 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/](http://www.gov.bc.ca/bced/)
- **BC Child Development and Rehabilitation Association** - This refers to all the child development centres (CDCs) in the province, including the Centre for Ability in Vancouver. 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.  
[www.centreforchilddevelopment.ca](http://www.centreforchilddevelopment.ca)
- **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)  
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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.bc.ca/](http://www.bcaslpa.bc.ca/), or occupational therapists [www.bcsot.org/](http://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. Students in other funding categories, including cognitive impairment and learning disabilities, are not eligible for services from this program.  
[www.setbc.org/](http://www.setbc.org/)

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[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/at\\_home/](http://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](http://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.

## Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC) Services in British Columbia

### 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/](http://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:  
[www.vch.ca/facilities/hospitals/vancouver/gpc.htm](http://www.vch.ca/facilities/hospitals/vancouver/gpc.htm)
- **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 250-721-1904. [www.viha.ca/hcc/services/](http://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.bc.ca/](http://www.bcaslpa.bc.ca/), or occupational therapists [www.bcsot.org/](http://www.bcsot.org/).

#### **Tertiary /Specialized Services:**

- **G.F. Strong Rehab 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 requiring 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/](http://www.vch.ca/gfstrong/)

The Assistive Technology and Seating Service (ATSS) at G.F. Strong 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](http://www.assistive-technology.ca)

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- **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](http://www.at-bc.ca)
- **Technology for Independent Living (TIL)** – TIL is administered by the BC Paraplegic Association (BCPA). Operational funding is provided through the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. TIL’s mandate is to provide augmentative communication systems (ACS) and environmental control systems (ECS) to adults with severe disabilities in BC. Assessment letters submitted to TIL should indicate that assistive devices are necessary supports to maintain their level of independence. A team of biomedical engineering technologists is available to install, repair, and support technologies in clients’ homes throughout the province. ACS and ECS devices are loaned to individuals indefinitely and remain the property of TIL.  
[www.bcits.org/](http://www.bcits.org/)
- **Communication Assistance for Young Adults (CAYA)** – CAYA is a project initiated by SET-BC to serve adults between the ages of 19-35 who require alternative or augmentative communication (AAC) assistance. Funded by the Ministry of Housing and Social development (MHSD), CAYA is designed to address the crucial transition period to adulthood for young people with severe communication disabilities. CAYA provides AAC technology on a long-term loan basis as well as assessment and support through speech-language pathologists (SLP), SLP Assistants, and technicians.  
[www.cayabc.org/](http://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 to repair their AAC devices.  
[www.als.ca/](http://www.als.ca/)

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- **MS Society** - This society provides services to individuals with multiple sclerosis throughout BC. The society occasionally buys AAC technology, or provides funding towards the purchase of AAC technology, for individuals with MS. The device then becomes the property of the individual, who is responsible for technical support and repair.  
[www.mssociety.ca/](http://www.mssociety.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 :  
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