

Independent Living Funding Assistive Technology in Delaware

The Independent Living (IL) Program, a unit within the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), is a valuable funding source for assistive technology for persons with disabilities who are unable to work.

Distinction Between Vocational Rehabilitation and IL

Both Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and IL services are authorized under the same federal law, The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (the Act). However, the rationale for funding assistive technology (AT) under each of these programs is very different. With regard to VR, the Act recognizes that work is a valuable activity that allows individuals to be productive members in mainstream society. The Act further notes that individuals with disabilities can achieve gainful employment if given appropriate supports and services.

The Act designates funding for a single state agency (in Delaware, it is DVR) to operate a comprehensive program of vocational rehabilitation. The Act mandates a broad variety of services that the state agency must provide, including "rehabilitation technology" (AT). The theme uniting all VR services, including AT, is that they must be connected to an employment goal.

However, the IL provisions of the Act promote a philosophy of independent living. This was done through funding an independent living program within each state as well as establishing Centers for Independent Living (CILs) controlled by consumers within the community. This aspect of the Act seeks to maximize self-determination, independence, and to further individual and system advocacy. IL focuses on enabling individuals to function independently in the community. (Unlike VR services, IL services do not need to be connected to an employment goal.) AT is funded under the IL Program when the device or modification will further the goal of independent living.

Independent Living Eligibility

In order to be eligible for IL services, one must:

- Be a Delaware resident aged 16 or older
- Have a significant disability
- Meet a financial needs test (Most people will qualify, recipients of SSI and SSDI benefits automatically meet this test)
- Seek to live independently.

An applicant to the IL program does not need to have a job or vocational goal. If a person has an employment goal, even if they do not currently have a job, they should contact DVR.

Obtaining AT and/or Related Services

Federal law exempts IL offices from the customary "comparable services and benefits" restriction when it comes to providing AT for clients. This means that IL beneficiaries do not have to endure delays in obtaining AT while the counselor searches for other funding sources before being allowed to pay for AT with IL money.

Upon entry into the IL program, applicants work with an IL counselor to determine which services may be needed to help them live more independently. This process leads to the development of an Independent Living Plan (ILP). The ILP should document any needed AT or service, such as home or vehicle modifications, adaptive driving equipment, and environmental control units. Thereafter, the counselor arranges for the necessary AT or service. Due to the demand for services, at times there may be a waiting period before needed AT is provided.

IL often combines its resources with those of other public and private agencies in order to maximize its ability to obtain AT for clients. IL also has specific guidelines governing access to certain types of AT, such as home modifications, vehicle modifications, and hearing aids. IL will pay for the most "cost-conscious" home modification option, which means it will pay to remodel existing space but will not pay for additions to residences. As an example, consider a person who uses a wheelchair and needs access to the second floor of his residence in order to use the bathroom. If a stairlift will fulfill that need, IL would pay for it rather than fund a more expensive remodeling of the downstairs to construct a new bathroom. If the client's preference was for a new downstairs bathroom, IL would contribute an amount equal to the cost of the stairlift toward the bathroom construction

project.

Regarding vehicle modifications, IL will condition its payment upon several factors, such as the age of the vehicle, mileage, and general condition.

With regard to hearing aids, IL may be able to assist with a purchase under certain conditions. IL will only purchase devices for those with significant hearing loss in the conversational speech range. The program requires that the need for a hearing aid is justified with medical documentation, and that the specific device recommendation comes from a licensed audiologist. IL will only pay for a hearing aid once in a client's lifetime, and will not cover device repair.

Consideration of Other Options

As mentioned, IL's funds are limited at times, so it is often more advantageous for the client to obtain AT such as seating, positioning, and mobility devices through other funding sources such as private insurance or Medicaid. If an IL counselor suspects that an item is medically necessary, the case is forwarded to DVR's medical consultant.

Client Assistance Program

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a consumer-based organization that advocates for persons with disabilities and provides information and referral services. Individuals may contact CAP if they are having difficulty in accessing IL services or if they have complaints about services that have already been provided.

Questions may be directed to the CAP office in the person's county of residence.

New Castle County
(302) 764-2400 (voice)
(302) 764-8708 (TDD)

Kent/Sussex County
(800) 640-9336
(302) 698-9336 (voice)
(302) 698-9338 (fax)

Contact Information

The contact information for the Independent Living Program is as follows:

Appoquinimink State Service Center
(302) 378-5779 (voice/TDD)

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI)

Center for Applied Science & Engineering
University of Delaware
(800) 870-DATI

www.dati.org

dati@asel.udel.edu

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