



Global Access to Assistive Technology for People with Intellectual Disabilities



Assistive Technology:

Is the application of organized knowledge and skills related to assistive products, including systems and services.

Assistive Products:

Any external product (including devices, equipment, instruments or software), especially produced or generally available, the primary purpose of which is to maintain or improve an individual's functioning and independence, and thereby promote their well-being. Assistive products are also used to prevent impairments and secondary health conditions.

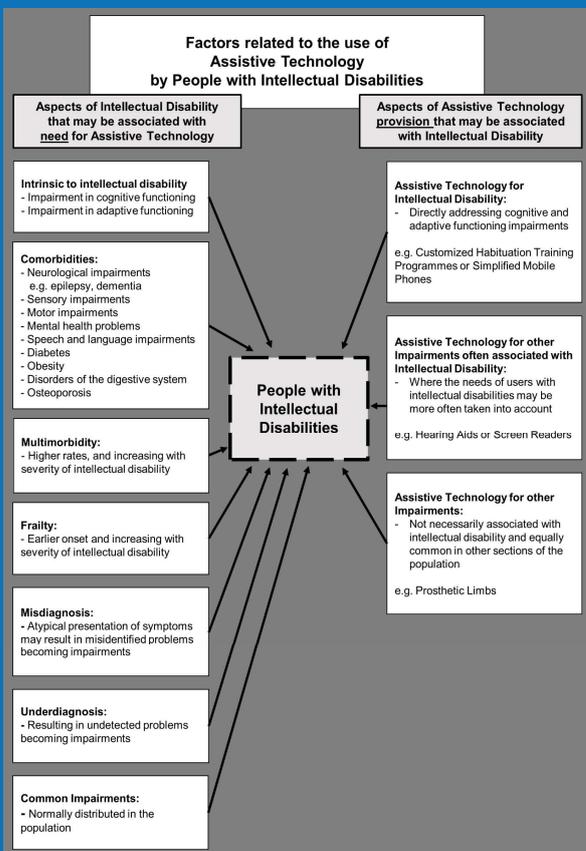
Domains:

- Mobility
- Vision
- Hearing
- Communication
- Cognition
- Environment & personal care

Examples:

- Wheelchair, adjusted footwear
- Glasses, magnifiers
- Hearing aids, alarm signalers with light
- Communication boards and cards
- Pill organiser, time management product
- Shower chair, incontinence products

We present a framework for understanding the complex interaction between intellectual disability, health and wellbeing, and assistive technology



Source: Fleur Heleen Boot, John Dinsmore, Chapal Khasnabis & Malcolm MacLachlan (2017) Intellectual Disability and Assistive Technology: Opening the GATE Wider. *Front. Public Health*, 22 February 2017. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2017.00010>

Background:

Only 10% of the people who are in need of assistive products actually have access to them, despite such access being claimed to be a human right. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has launched a programme to promote Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE) as an initiative following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The GATE programme's objective is to improve access to high quality, affordable assistive products for people with varying disabilities, diseases and age related conditions.

A specific group of people in need of assistive products are people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Although the prevalence of people with ID is around 1% of the total population, it is expected to be a large group of people in need of assistive products. Especially with the increasing life expectancy for this population and the related impact of multimorbidity and frailty. Compared to the general population, people with ID have a higher prevalence of comorbidities which could be better managed with assistive products, such as motor disabilities, sensory impairments and dementia. People with ID often have an atypical presentation of symptoms and depend on their care system to access healthcare and assistive products.

However, barriers that people with ID experience regarding access to assistive products have not yet been sufficiently considered. Worldwide, people with ID are still generally regarded as a devalued and stigmatised group, and at least part of their relatively poor health status is due to health inequities. It is unknown what proportion of people with ID globally actually has access to appropriate assistive products.



Objective:

The objective of this study is to identify: (1) Facilitators and barriers for people with ID to effectively access assistive products, (2) How effective access and use can be promoted across high, medium and low resource settings.

We call for a greater focus on the needs of people with ID within the GATE initiative.

Challenges:

Impairments in cognitive and adaptive functioning intrinsic to ID

- Communication
- Instruction and support
- Multidisciplinary approach

Awareness among caregivers and health and social care professionals

- Recognize ID
- High prevalence of comorbidities
- Proactive approach

Impairments which are not related to ID

- Ageing
- Lack of research within people with ID

Methods:

Literature

A systematic review on current scientific evidence of factors, including specific cultural, political, social and economic considerations, influencing adequate access to assistive products for people with ID.

Focus groups

Through focus groups with people with ID and assistive technology specialists, experiences, expertise and best practices in a well-resourced 'model system' setting are gathered. The aim will be to examine potential opportunities and barriers to assistive products availability, use and deployment for people with ID.

Research partner: Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews in different resource settings with people with ID and providers of assistive products.

Participants:

- People with ID
 - Adults
 - Mild to profound ID
 - Users and non-users of assistive products
- Providers of assistive products
 - Health professionals
 - Suppliers
 - Policy makers

Countries: Ireland, South Africa & India.

Research partners: Daughters of Charity, Stellenbosch University & Mobility India.