

I am a Speech-language pathologist who specializes in assistive technology. I manage the Assistive Technology Assessment Center at the Missouri Rehabilitation Center in Mt. Vernon, Missouri (southwestern). We also have a satellite Assistive Technology Evaluation Center in Columbia, Missouri on the U. of Missouri campus. Between the 2 assessment sites, we evaluate 15-25 clients a month with speech and expressive language disorders. We evaluate children and adults of all ages who present with a variety of diagnoses that result in either the inability to speak at all, or in speech that is so unintelligible they can't be understood most of the time. About 95% of the clients that we evaluate are candidates for an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device (also known to the Medicare world as Speech Generating Devices - SGDs), which are considered durable medical equipment. The AAC devices or SGDs are funded by Medicaid, Medicare, and most private insurance companies.

Many of the individuals that receive AAC devices want to be able to talk on the telephone. Some of the higher technology devices (dynamic display AAC devices) have the ability to use a phone card and therefore can use their devices to speak on the phone through the device. However, with most of the AAC devices the user has to set their AAC device by a telephone that has a speaker phone, and use their device to speak their messages that can be heard through the speaker phone. I think that a broadband-based telephone assistance service would be a welcome and used service for many AAC users.

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