VERMONT

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The Department of Vermont Health Access Clinical Criteria

Subject: Augmentative Communication Device or System
Last Review: November 17, 2022*
Past Revisions: November 12, 2020, November 4, 2019, January 30, 2017, November 10, 2016**,** June 18, 2015, May 8, 2014, June 25, 2013, and April 23, 2012

***Please note: Most current content changes will be highlighted in yellow.**

Description of Service or Procedure

"Augmentative Communication Device or System" means a specialized type of device that transmits or produces messages or symbols in a manner that compensates for a member's severe communication impairment. A system also includes any software and peripheral devices required by the member to use the primary device effectively.

Note that augmentative communication (ACD) devices are also described as speech generating (SGD) devices and alternative/augmentative communication (AAC) devices.

A mobile communication device is one that uses commercially available technology, such as an iPad.

A specialized communication device is specifically designed for augmentative communication and is available through specialized vendors, such as a traditional speech generating device.

Disclaimer

Coverage is limited to that outlined in Medicaid Rule or Health Care Administrative Rules that pertains to the member's aid category. Prior Authorization (PA) is only valid if the member is eligible for the applicable item or service on the date of service.

Medicaid Rule

Medicaid and Health Care Administrative Rules can be found at https://humanservices.vermont.gov/rules-policies/health-care-rules/health-care-administrative-rules-hcar/adopted-rules

7102.2	Prior Authorization Determination
4.101	Medical Necessity for Covered Services
4.104	Medicaid Non-Covered Services
4.209	Durable Medical Equipment
4.211	Augmentative Communication Devices and Systems

Coverage Position

Augmentative Communication systems may be covered for members:

- When the device is prescribed by a licensed medical provider, enrolled in the Vermont Medicaid program, operating within their scope of practice as described on the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation's website*, Statute, or rule who is knowledgeable regarding Augmentative Communication systems, and who provides medical care to the member AND
- When the clinical criteria below are met.

* Vermont's Office of Professional Regulation's website: https://sos.vermont.gov/opr/

Coverage Criteria

Augmentative communication devices/systems may be covered for members who:

- Have a severe communication impairment; and
- Have undergone a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified speech language pathologist; and
- Have undergone a successful trial of at least one-month duration, and must include the home and community environment, to ensure that the device/system will meet the member's medical needs; and
- Have been prescribed a device/system that considers the current and future needs of the beneficiary, where the prescription has been completed by a qualified speech language pathologist and endorsed by a physician or advanced practice provider working within their scope of practice; and
- Have demonstrated the ability to use the device for medically necessary purposes, including but not limited to activities of daily living; and
- Have demonstrated that the device/system shall be used by the member such that the communication originates from the member and not from a facilitator or support person.

Coverage for a rental device/system may be covered for members who:

- Require a temporary device/system for use while a primary device is being repaired; or
- Require a device/system for the required trial evaluation period; or
- Have a short term need only.

Note: all augmentative communication devices/systems, both purchase and rental, require prior authorization.

When making its determinations for coverage, The Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA) utilizes nationally recognized evidence-based criteria, internal guidelines which reflect Vermont Medicaid Rule, and the Vermont Medicaid Rules themselves.

All covered devices must meet the beneficiary's medical needs (HCAR 4.101), must match the capability of the device/system/accessories to the member's medical needs within the limitations of Vermont Medicaid coverage, and must be the least expensive, medically appropriate device (7102.2).

The documentation provided in the Augmentative Communication Evaluation and Prescription Forms are advisory in nature. Their purpose is to assist medical providers and durable medical equipment providers to complete a successful coverage request to Vermont Medicaid. Use of the DVHA forms and the information contained on the forms will facilitate the prior authorization process.

Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT): Vermont Medicaid will provide comprehensive services and furnish all Medicaid coverable, appropriate, and medically necessary services needed to correct and ameliorate health conditions for Medicaid members under age 21.

Please note, Vermont Medicaid Clinical Criteria is reviewed based on available literature, evidence- based guidelines/standards, Medicaid rule and policy, and Medicare coverage determinations that may be appropriate to incorporate when applicable.

Clinical criteria for repeat service or procedure

- When the device no longer meets the medical needs of the member, OR
- When the device is no longer functional through normal wear (expected to last at least 5 years)

Type of service or procedure covered

Covered augmentative communication devices/ systems include but are not limited to the following:

(1) Non-powered devices,
(2) Battery-powered systems such as specialized typewriters,
(3) Electronic and computerized devices, such as: electrolarynges; portable speech devices; hand-held computers and memo pads; typewriter-style communication aids with an electronic display and/or synthesized speech; electronic memo writers with key or membrane pad; customized assisted keyboards; scanning devices including optical pointer, single switch, mouse, trackball, and/or Morse code access; laptop or micro computers; and computer software, and
(4) Peripheral equipment including: eye-gaze systems, mounts, cases, speakers, pointers, switches, and switch interfaces that are specific to the use of the device or system as prescribed.

Other covered services include:

(1) Modification, programming, or adaptation of Medicaid-purchased devices when provided by qualified speech language pathologists, and,
(2) Repairs/service on Medicaid-purchased items after the original manufacturer's warranty expires and when the repair/service is ordered by a qualified provider and provided by a qualified vendor. Rental devices are covered during the repair period, and
(3) Comprehensive evaluation by a qualified speech language pathologist.

Type of service or procedure not covered (this list may not be all inclusive)

- Devices/systems for purposes other than communication
- Equipment prescribed specifically for educational or vocational purposes
- More than one primary device
- Devices/systems where the communication does not originate from the member but instead from a facilitator or support person
- Training by the manufacturer or supplier beyond what is included in the purchase of the device is not covered. If additional training is necessary for the member to set up and use the device, it may be obtained through a licensed speech language pathologist
- Extended warranties

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