

## AT NETWORK & CATRC POLICY BRIEF

*Over 6.8 million Californians lack health insurance and millions more are underinsured, making it very difficult or impossible for them to obtain needed durable medical equipment (DME) and assistive technology (AT) to improve and maintain their health and independence.*

### What is Assistive Technology (AT) and Durable Medical Equipment (DME)?

Assistive Technology is any device, gadget, hardware or software used by a person with a disability to do things for themselves that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to do because of their disability.

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) is any reusable item that exists primarily to provide a medical function. DME encompasses a wide range of items and includes wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, hospital beds, shower chairs and portable ramps.

### What is Assistive Technology (AT) Reuse?

AT Reuse is the business of reclaiming and redistributing previously-owned assistive technology and durable medical equipment. AT Reuse ensures

the equipment's maximum use for the full value of its lifecycle. It places used equipment in the hands of people who need it.

Examples of AT and DME commonly donated and reassigned through California's current AT Reuse programs include wheelchairs, walkers, computers and hospital beds.

AT Reuse programs accept donations of AT, and then clean, repair and distribute the devices to people in their communities who need them. Some programs charge a small fee for this service, and other programs offer the used equipment free to the new owner. Most of California's AT Reuse programs focus on the redistribution of durable medical equipment.

The California Health Benefits Review Program estimates approximately 5.5% of people who have health insurance will use durable medical equipment

each year. When people no longer need their DME, the item may still have value. Many pieces of equipment in good condition can be distributed back into the community.

### How AT Reuse Helps Californians:

AT Reuse fills the gaps when Californians are unable to obtain the new devices they need. Who needs used devices?

- The 18% of Californians without health insurance.
- The 1.3 million Californians who have health insurance without DME coverage.
- Californians with partial DME coverage and large out-of-pocket costs.

### The Hidden Need for DME Among the Insured:

Californians who have health insurance with a durable medical equipment benefit have less coverage than ever before. Many insurance companies implement annual DME benefit limits that typically total \$2,000 to \$3,000. This means that

people with private insurance coverage, both group and individual plans, are incurring more out-of-pocket costs for durable medical equipment. Approximately 72,000 insured DME users currently have to pay \$26.6 million in expenses for non-covered benefits. Often people with health insurance can't afford the out-of-pocket costs to purchase the DME they desperately need to improve their health, function, or to recover from an injury or surgery. Without the needed DME, they may not be able to return to work, get around the house, or engage with the community.

### Why AT Reuse?

Currently, California's AT Reuse programs primarily accept donations of durable medical equipment in their local communities. Unfortunately, AT Reuse programs are few, and many Californians do not have access to AT Reuse programs in their communities. The time is right to increase the scope of AT Reuse throughout California.

- AT Reuse fills the gap when Californians are unable to obtain the new devices they need.

- AT Reuse saves money for the person using the equipment.
- AT Reuse saves health care costs by preventing secondary disabilities that would have developed without it.
- AT Reuse keeps useable equipment out of the landfill, which is good for the environment.
- AT Reuse ensures efficient and effective use of California's resources by using equipment to its full potential.

### Recommendations

- **Reclaim DME.** California's Medi-Cal program purchases DME for Medi-Cal recipients throughout the state. Requiring Medi-Cal recipients to return certain DME when no longer needed would allow the equipment to be refurbished and redistributed.
- **Statewide Expansion.** California needs more AT Reuse programs. Funding an expansion of AT Reuse programs throughout the state means more people would have access to the medical equipment they need.

- **Create a Transportation Network.** AT Reuse programs only transport used equipment to people in their local communities. The creation of a transportation network would allow Californians access to a much larger inventory of used DME regardless of their location.
- **Maintain Choice.** Californians must maintain their choice of equipment. Individuals with health insurance should always have the choice of receiving a new device in lieu of a used device.

For more information, please contact the AT Network at:

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