



MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

*Fact Sheet Developed with
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute and
Autism Insurance Resource Center*

MassHealth Coverage of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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Children with Autism now have MassHealth coverage of non-dedicated iPads used as communication devices

Q. What is AAC - augmentative and alternative communication?

Augmentative and alternative communication, also known as AAC, describes several different ways to communicate that enhance speech for people who have difficulty using speech alone to communicate. Children with autism who have difficulty communicating may benefit from AAC. Many different AAC methods are used by people of all ages with a range of disabilities.

Q. What is the difference between a dedicated and non-dedicated device?

Dedicated devices: are devices that are only able to perform AAC functions or are locked in a way to only allow AAC functions to work. Examples include communication boards or books, electro larynxes; speech/voice amplifiers; and electronic devices that can only be used to assist with communication.

Non-dedicated devices: are devices that can be programmed to perform AAC functions but can also be used to perform other functions, for example unlocked electronic tablets or iPads.

MassHealth will cover non-dedicated electronic tablets (iPads) that have been set up for use as an AAC device, when medically necessary. Use of the device to text and e-mail can also be covered when determined medically necessary for communication. MassHealth will not cover the cost of cellular or data plans.

Q. What types of MassHealth insurance cover electronic tablets used for AAC?

Children with autism under the age of 21 who are covered by MassHealth Standard or MassHealth CommonHealth are eligible for coverage of non-dedicated medically necessary AAC devices, including electronic tablets such as iPads.

Q. What are the steps required to obtain a non-dedicated tablet as an AAC device for MassHealth members enrolled in a managed care organization (MCO)?

The device will be provided through the MCO based on the procedures of the MCO. Currently the 5 MassHealth MCO's that include children and youth under 21 are: Boston Medical Center HealthNet Plan, Fallon Community Health, Health New England, Inc., Neighborhood Health Plan and Tufts Health Plan Together. You should contact your MCO or your doctor to find out the steps to take if your child needs an AAC device.

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Q. What is the process if I have MassHealth CommonHealth as secondary insurance?

If your primary insurance provider covers electronic tablets used for AAC, you must first seek benefits under your primary plan. If you obtain a tablet through your primary insurance and have MassHealth CommonHealth as secondary insurance, MassHealth may cover the related co-pays and deductibles.

Q. What if my primary insurance does not cover electronic tablets used for AAC?

If a speech and language pathologist recommends an AAC device that your primary insurance does not cover and you have MassHealth CommonHealth as secondary insurance, you must meet the guidelines for MassHealth coverage of the device. See steps for MassHealth coverage below.

Q. What are the steps required to obtain a non-dedicated tablet as an AAC device for members enrolled in the Primary Care Clinician Plan or who have MassHealth CommonHealth as a secondary insurance provider?

For children with a MassHealth Primary Care Clinician plan or MassHealth CommonHealth as secondary insurance, the primary care clinician, a speech and language pathologist, and – if accessories are necessary – a durable medical equipment supplier must work together with the family as outlined in the steps below:

1. You must get a referral for a speech evaluation from your child's primary care doctor.
2. You must have your child evaluated by a speech and language pathologist. The speech and language pathologist will perform an evaluation, including a trial of the device to make sure it is the best choice for your child. A treatment plan will be made based on the results of the evaluation and trial(s).
3. Once the evaluation and trial are complete, you must get a prescription for the device recommended by the speech and language pathologist from your primary care clinician. Note – your child must also have a diagnosis of autism AND a diagnosis of a severe communication disorder from your primary care clinician (physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner).
4. Your child's speech and language pathologist will use this prescription and diagnosis along with other necessary information to request prior authorization from MassHealth for the device. The speech and language pathologist submitting the request for pre-authorization must be a MassHealth participating provider. However, he/she *may* include documentation, including evaluations and trial information from school or other non-MassHealth speech and language pathologists to support the medical necessity of the device. Once approved, MassHealth will buy the AAC device and software.
5. Once MassHealth receives the device, it will be sent directly to your speech and language pathologist. Your speech and language pathologist will schedule a follow-up appointment with you to deliver the device and give you basic training on how to use it. This appointment will be covered by MassHealth as a necessary follow-up visit.

MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN



6. If accessories are necessary, your speech and language pathologist will work directly with the MassHealth Durable Medical Equipment (DME) provider to obtain the accessories approved by MassHealth. Accessories include cases, wheelchair mounts and other necessary equipment. These will also be delivered directly to the speech and language pathologist and will be given to you when you receive your device.
7. All recommended configurations and programming to the tablet will be made by the manufacturer and/or speech and language pathologist before the device is provided to you.

Q. What happens if the request is denied by MassHealth?

If MassHealth denies the request for coverage, the patient will be notified and can appeal to an impartial hearing officer.

Q. Are speech applications (“apps”) or accessories for electronic tablets covered?

Yes. MassHealth covers medically necessary applications and accessories (such as covers) if recommended by the speech and language pathologist and submitted by the speech language pathologist for approval by MassHealth.

Q. What if my child’s needs change and they require different applications?

The need for new applications must meet MassHealth medical necessity guidelines. In order to have MassHealth pay for the application, prior authorization (as outlined above) must be obtained through a MassHealth authorized speech language pathologist.

Q. Can the speech language pathologist at my child’s school help me obtain a tablet for my child?

The speech language pathologist at your child’s school may be able to assist with necessary evaluations and device trials required before you can seek MassHealth approval for coverage. However, the speech language pathologist who submits the request to MassHealth for coverage of the device and who coordinates delivery and training on the device must be an in-network approved provider with MassHealth.

Q. Who can I call for more information?

MassHealth Customer Service: (1-800-841-2900)
Autism Insurance Resource Center: (774-455-4056)
Massachusetts Advocates for Children: (617-357-8431 x3224)