



# Mercy Care Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Guide for DD Members, Families and Caregivers

## **This guide will help the member, family and caregivers understand:**

1. How the AAC process works.
2. How to work with Mercy Care to get an AAC device or system.
3. How to work with the AAC providers.

## **What is an AAC System?**

An AAC system provides a member with a different or added way(s) to tell their wants, needs, and thoughts. The AAC system should be used by the member in all settings (home, school, community).

## **How to start the AAC process**

1. Member gets a prescription/referral from their physician for an AAC assessment by a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP). This prescription is good for 12 months.

2. Member may contact the DD support coordinator, Mercy Care member services and health plan liaisons to get contact information for an in-network licensed and registered SLP from Mercy Care's website at [www.mercycareaz.org/members/ddd-formembers/aac](http://www.mercycareaz.org/members/ddd-formembers/aac).
3. Once the member chooses an SLP, the member calls the SLP to schedule an assessment. The SLP will schedule the assessment. Page 29 of the [member handbook](#) says, a specialty appointment should be scheduled within 45 days of when the member calls and asks for the assessment.

## **Mercy Care doesn't require Prior Authorization for the SLP assessment.**

### **What happens during the AAC assessment?**

1. Before the assessment, the SLP will determine the appropriate AAC device(s) for the member to try during the assessment visit.
2. The SLP will bring to the assessment up to three AAC devices for the member to try during the visit. Other therapy providers besides the SLP may also contribute to the assessment.
3. During the assessment, a family, along with their clinical team, can try one of the AAC devices for up to 30 days. This is called a trial period. During the trial period, the SLP will help make sure that the device is meeting the member's needs.
4. After an AAC device has been trialed and the treatment team, member and family agree on the AAC device, the SLP will send the assessment report to the referring provider for signature.

### **What happens after the AAC assessment?**

1. Once the provider signs off on the recommended AAC device, the SLP will submit a prior authorization (PA) request to Mercy Care for the device. The submission of the PA for the device happens within 20 days from the AAC assessment.
2. The PA will include supporting documentation from the assessment, expected training hours, and the list of the necessary accessories for the proper use of the AAC system.
3. Once Mercy Care receives the PA, a decision must be made within 14 days.
4. If the AAC device, training and accessories are approved, the order will be sent to MedOne, Mercy Care's preferred AAC device provider.
5. If the PA for the AAC device is not approved, the member will get a Notice of Adverse Determination (NOA) letter in the mail.

### **How will the member receive the device?**

1. The AAC device will be mailed or delivered directly to the member's home.
2. Once the member receives the AAC device, the member must contact the SLP to schedule training of the AAC device.
3. Mercy Care expects the first training to be completed no later than 90 days from when the AAC device was requested by Mercy Care.

### **Which accessories may come with an AAC system?**

- Devices that allow the selection of letters, words, or symbols using things like optical head pointers, joysticks, and AAC scanning devices.
- Switches and buttons may be considered for members with limited gross motor skills and head control.
- Head control access devices, such as laser or infrared pointers, may be considered for members with limited hand control and good head control.
- Applicable software.
- Device case.
- Batteries.
- Battery charger.
- Power supplies.
- Interface cables.
- Interconnects.
- Sensors.
- Moisture guard.
- A/C or other electrical adapters.
- Adequate memory for system expansion within a 3-year time frame.
- Mounting systems, when medically necessary, is equipment used to place the AAC system, switches, and devices within reach of the member. Mounting systems may be considered for reimbursement when used to attach an AAC device to a wheelchair or table.
- Any extended warranty by the device manufacturer.

### **What is not included with the AAC system?**

Laptop or desktop computers, personal digital assistant (PDAs), or other devices that aren't dedicated AAC device systems may not be covered because they don't meet the definition of DME.

Items that aren't necessary to run the device and aren't related to the AAC device system components are not covered. These items include, but are not limited to:

- Printer
- Wireless internet router or other ways to get to the internet

### **What if the AAC system needs a repair?**

1. All repairs require PA by Mercy Care.
2. Mercy Care will cover one device repair every 12 months due to normal wear and tear unless the device is under warranty.
3. The member can work with the DD support coordinator, the original treating SLP, or MedOne to confirm if device is under warranty.
4. MedOne will help the member to return the device if it's under warranty.
5. Mercy Care won't cover the replacement of applications that have been deleted or can't be accessed due to loss of username and password.

### **What if the member needs an AAC replacement?**

The device and accessories are expected to last up to 36 months.

If a replacement is needed, the member must reach out to their provider to get a prescription/referral to begin the assessment process as described earlier under, "How to begin the process?". The DD support coordinator can help support the process.

The replacement of an AAC system or its components will be considered in the following circumstances and will require a prior authorization:

1. When loss or irreparable damage has occurred.

2. It's been 3 years since the first prescription, and the AAC system is no longer functional.
3. There is a change in the member's condition that affects the use of the current AAC system.
4. The current AAC system doesn't meet the member's needs despite adequate training.
5. There is documentation, from the manufacturer, that the SGD can't be repaired.
6. Accessories purchased by the DD are damaged or worn.
7. The AAC system has been lost or stolen, and the following documentation is submitted:
  - A police report, if stolen.
  - A "Find My iPad" report from Apple (iPad only).

### **What if a re-assessment or changes to the device are needed?**

A re-assessment and modification may be allowed in the following circumstances:

1. At least 3 months of training is provided.
2. There's a change in the member's medical condition.
3. The member isn't meeting or exceeding current goals with the current AAC system.

The member should contact the original treating SLP who provided the device and training. The DD support coordinator may help in contacting the original SLP.

### **Mercy Care does not require Prior Authorization for a re-assessment.**

#### **What if school-based therapy is involved?**

Mercy Care does not provide school-based therapy services. Mercy Care will accept an AAC assessment completed by the school's SLP for consideration in the PA process for a device provided by Mercy Care. The member should work with the DD support coordinator to get a copy of the school's AAC assessment to provide to Mercy Care.