

# Getting Ready for Assistive Technology in Social Care

Julie Eshleman



▲ Picture shows disabled people using various assistive technologies to interact with one another. Image created with Microsoft Designer AI.

## Introduction

Using assistive technology (AT) in social care settings can help disabled people be more independent and happy. This guide will show you how to check if a place is ready to use smart home devices, environmental controls, health technology, and other kinds of assistive technologies.

This guide is based on research done in care homes in the United Kingdom. Leonard Cheshire started using assistive technology in Hill House, and then expanded to other care homes. This included devices like Alexa, smart plugs to turn on fans, smart televisions, and some other accessories disabled people could control. But different people got different benefits from these devices in each place because of team cultures and beliefs about technology and how care could use technology to make people more independent. The researcher used various methods to find out what worked, who it worked for, under what conditions it worked best, and why it worked that way.

These are the findings from the research – detailed plans that can be used in different places to make sure more disabled people can use assistive technologies to become more independent and build the daily lives they want. You can use this plan like a checklist to see if your home is ready for assistive technology. If it is not, it will give you some tasks to work on to get ready!

## Checklist: Key Areas to Check

To see if your home is ready for AT, look at these four areas:

1. **Physical Infrastructure**
2. **Financial Accessibility**
3. **Technology Leadership**
4. **Assistive Technology Knowledge and Skills**

### Physical Infrastructure

A stable physical setup is very important when planning to use technology. The main parts of a stable setup are enough power mains, good internet access, and fast broadband.

#### Things to Check:

1. **Power Mains:** Are there enough mains to plug in all the devices?
2. **Internet Access:** Is there reliable internet with enough speed to support all devices?
3. **Outlet Accessibility:** Are the mains easy to reach for the person using them?

#### Next Steps:

- **If Ready:** Move to the next steps to check financial accessibility, technology leadership, and assistive technology knowledge and skills.
- **If Not Ready:** Add more mains or power strips, improve internet access, or help rearrange the space to make it more accessible.

### Financial Accessibility

Knowing about and getting money for assistive technology is one of the biggest problems in care settings. It's important to clearly understand the available resources and how to get and use them to make sure assistive technology is used well and lasts a long time.

#### Things to Check:

- **Money Sources:** Are there funds, subsidies, or insurance to buy and install (set up) the devices?
- **Maintenance Funds:** Is there money to keep the devices running? Is there money for ongoing costs like subscriptions?

## Next Steps:

- **If Ready:** Make a plan for how you might purchase assistive technologies, but first check technology leadership and assistive technology knowledge and skills.
- **If Not Ready:** Look for more funding through grants, donations, or insurance. Find cheaper options if needed. Get in touch with local professionals like Vocational Rehabilitation, Physical Therapists, or Occupational Therapists, who may be able to help or give advice.

## Technology Leadership

This research found that disabled people did better with their assistive technology when their care home had leaders who were good at using technology and believed in its benefits.

### Things to Check:

1. **Confidence in Tech:** Do managers and team leaders believe in using technology? Can you see them using it when they are supporting people?
2. **Support Worker Buy-In:** Do support workers have a positive attitude towards technology?

### Next Steps:

**If Ready:** Great! Move on to check assistive technology and skills – you are very close!

**If Not Ready:** Hold workshops and training to build confidence and enthusiasm for technology. Start getting people more excited about the possibilities of technology use. Start finding ways that technology helps in daily life already, and talk about it!

## Assistive Technology Knowledge and Skills

People need to know what kinds of technologies are available, or they will not know what to buy or try. Once they have some technology, they need to feel confident that they can use the technology well, and can fix it if it is not working.

## Things to Check:

- 1. Understanding Devices:** Do people know how to use common technology devices? These might be smart phones, tablets like iPads, laptop computers, or digital televisions.
- 2. Troubleshooting:** Can they fix simple problems with the devices? When they are not working, do they try a few things to make it right?
- 3. Guides:** Are there easy guides for common functions?

## Next Steps:

- **If Ready:** You and your team are probably ready to start exploring assistive technology! Go to the Implementation and Outcomes section.
- **If Not Ready:** Organize training sessions and provide guides and troubleshooting tips for common devices and issues.

## Implementation and Outcomes

When all of these areas are well prepared, disabled people are more likely to get the best use out of their assistive technology. By looking at the physical infrastructure, financial accessibility, technology leadership, and assistive technology knowledge and skills, you can create a supportive environment for using assistive technology. This can lead to better technology use for independence, more social activities, and greater satisfaction for disabled people in care settings.

You may start your assistive technology journey by searching online for things like ‘smart home technology’ or ‘assistive technology’ and watching videos to learn more about devices that might help you.

**Be sure to ask your support workers for support, and advocate to have assistive technology made part of your care plan so it is prioritised as a tool for you to build the life you want!**

**To find out about Leonard Cheshire’s Assistive Technology programme, go to:**

[leonardcheshire.org/assistive-technology-leonard-cheshire](https://leonardcheshire.org/assistive-technology-leonard-cheshire)