



Assistive Technology

The Official Journal of RESNA

RESNA



ISSN: 1040-0435 (Print) 1949-3614 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/uaty20

Defining assistive technology: Adopting a common framework

Emma M. Smith

To cite this article: Emma M. Smith (2024) Defining assistive technology: Adopting a common framework, *Assistive Technology*, 36:6, 397-397, DOI: [10.1080/10400435.2024.2416364](https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2024.2416364)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2024.2416364>



Published online: 23 Oct 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1682



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)



Defining assistive technology: Adopting a common framework

The World Health Organization defines Assistive Technology as “the application of organized knowledge and skills related to assistive products, including systems and services,” and further clarifies that assistive technology is considered a subset of health technologies (World Health Organization, 2016). Assistive products are defined as “any external product (including devices, equipment, instruments, or software) especially produced or generally available, the primary purpose of which is to maintain or improve an individual’s functioning and independence, and thereby promote their well-being. Assistive products are also used to prevent impairments and secondary health conditions” (World Health Organization, 2016).

These definitions allow us to understand the concept of assistive technology broadly, recognizing the imperative of policies, systems, and services in accessing assistive products. They also allow us to categorize any product as an assistive product as long as it meets the broad definition offered by the WHO. This provides a clear opportunity to acknowledge the increasing role of mainstream technologies in supporting functioning, independence, and well-being. We also now understand assistive technology to serve a much broader section of the population, including older adults and people who are experiencing functional limitations associated with aging, people with short term assistive technology needs, and people with functional limitations associated with noncommunicable diseases who may not otherwise be considered persons with disabilities. These definitions support the understanding that at some point in our lives, nearly all of us will be assistive technology users.

At the Assistive Technology Journal, we have made the editorial decision to adopt the World Health Organization of assistive technology and assistive products in our work, aligning with global guidance documents, acknowledging the global nature of our work and publications. It is critical that as an

industry or field, we are using common language to describe the work that we do.

Adopting the WHO definition also allows us to make some important distinctions in our work between assistive technology (the focus of the Assistive Technology journal) and other areas of work which are related, but distinct and separate, including other subsets of health technology. For example, we are now able to distinguish more easily between assistive technology and rehabilitation technology, the latter which we understand to be the technology used only within a rehabilitation context.

While we are aware that the language of assistive technology and assistive products are not yet commonly used by all individuals in all countries, the publication of key documents like the WHO/UNICEF Global Report on Assistive Technology (World Health Organization, 2022) provide a solid foundation for the use of similar terms across national and international contexts.

In line with this decision, we will be revising the aims and scope of the Assistive Technology Journal to reflect our common understanding of these terms and provide clarity for our authors. We will continue to welcome submissions of high-quality research reflecting the breadth and depth of the field, including not only assistive products and their application, but also the policies, systems, and services which encompass a broader understanding of Assistive Technology.

References

- World Health Organization. (2016). *Priority assistive products list: Improving access to assistive technology for everyone, everywhere*.
World Health Organization. (2022). *Global report on assistive technology*.

Emma M. Smith, PhD
Maynooth University, Ireland

 journaleditor@resna.org

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2541-5723>