Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

The strategy or technique used by the person aims to maximise an individual's communication skills (i.e., production as well as comprehension) for functional and effective communication of their needs, preferences and wishes.

An AAC system may be used permanently or temporarily.

There are two main types of AAC:

(1) Unaided AAC:

Communication techniques that do not require the use of an external aid. This means that the person uses whatever is available to them, generally their own body. Examples of unaided AAC include using eye contact, facial expression, body language, gestures and manual sign.

(2) Aided AAC:

Any external item used to aid communication. Examples of aided AAC include:

- **High technology systems** (iPad, tablet, speech generating device)
- **Low technology systems** (real objects, communication books, pen & paper, pictures)

**Why might someone need to use AAC?**

- If a person is not able to speak they may need a variety of different types of AAC systems to communicate.
- If a person finds it difficult to understand what is being said, AAC can add more visual information to help them understand.
**How is an AAC system developed for a person with ABI?**

Due to the complexity and specificity, often an interdisciplinary AAC assessment is conducted. The Speech Pathologist is the key professional, and will focus primarily on the way someone communicates and make specific recommendations on AAC systems. An Occupational Therapist will focus on how they can communicate (i.e., how they access (use) the system, their sensory skills) and a physiotherapist may provide information regarding seating and positioning.

Following an assessment, a trial period is often conducted to test out the recommendations in various settings (E.g. at home, in the workplace, at a café, etc). Some people often benefit from a combination of aided (both low tech and high tech options) and unaided strategies, depending on the person’s communicative needs and contexts.

**What are the key points to be aware of?**

- AAC is not something to replace speech or language, rather it is an approach that encourages the development of spoken language
- The key to the success of establishing an effective AAC system is to use a client centred approach. Involving the person with the ABI in the selection and trial of various systems will ensure that the systems match up with the person’s cognitive skills, as well as their personal preferences
- One AAC system or strategy may not be sufficient to meet all of their needs, all of the time. A person with more complex needs may need a high tech system, a low tech system and an unaided system – depending on where they are and who they are communicating with
- The effectiveness of AAC also relies on the person’s communication partners, and how much support and training they receive. A willingness to provide a flexible communicative environment is paramount
- AAC systems may need to be modified as time goes on, with additional symbol or word pages or photos created to reflect the person’s activities and communication capabilities

**Here are some websites to help you learn more about assistive technology:**

- LifeTec: [https://www.lifetec.org.au/](https://www.lifetec.org.au/)
- Liberator: [http://www.liberator.net.au/](http://www.liberator.net.au/)