

Equipment and Assistive Technology Initiative (EATI) Evaluation: Project Summary

Note: We have tried to make this summary as easy to understand as possible. If you need help understanding it, please ask someone to help you. You can also contact the Centre for Inclusion and Citizenship (604-822-5872 or cic.ubc@ubc.ca) if you have more questions.

Introduction

The Equipment and Assistive Technology Initiative (EATI) was created in 2009. It is a program run by the British Columbia Personal Supports Network (BCPSN) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). For adults with disabilities in British Columbia who have an employment related goal, the program provides assistive technology (AT) (assistive equipment and devices). The purpose of this study was to find out:

- How assistive technology participants received through EATI was impacting them and their employment goals;
- How joint decision-making by community (BCPSN) and government partners (MSD) impacted the program; and
- How the Participation Model impacted program participants.

What is EATI?

EATI was developed to help people with disabilities in BC move towards employment by providing them assistive technology. The program recognizes that for some people, volunteering may be a step towards becoming employed. EATI is different from most programs that provide assistive technology because it encourages many program participants to decide for themselves what assistive devices and equipment they need (called a self-assessment). The program does not ask participants to prove they cannot afford to buy the assistive technology on their own and it does not make participants choose AT from a list of items the program has already approved. There is no price limit placed on assistive devices a participant can request, so participants can choose the assistive devices and equipment they need.

In order to become an EATI program participant, an individual must be over 18 years old, live in BC, and have an employment related goal. The person must be unemployed or be employed with low skills (for example, not have a high school diploma or have difficulty reading). The person must not be able to get Employment Insurance (EI), have not received EI in the past 3 years, and have not received parental benefits through EI in the past 5 years. The person must not be able to get funding through other provincial government programs or private insurers. Finally, the person must be able to show they need the assistive technology to move towards their employment goal.

What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

Assistive technology (or AT) is anything that can help a person overcome a barrier or challenge they may have due to their disability. It can be something 'low-tech' such as a cane, a walker, or a desk, to something 'high-tech' such as an 'iPad', computer software, or a GPS to help navigate the city. If it assists someone to overcome a

functional barrier, such as walking, hearing, or communicating for example, it can be requested through EATI.

What is the Participation Model?

The Participation Model is an idea. It describes a process for getting assistive devices. The Provincial Equipment and Assistive Devices Committee (PEADC) came up with this idea and EATI was developed based on it. The Model places people with disabilities in the center of decision-making, which means people with disabilities are always involved in decision-making concerning their needs. Beginning with the person's employment goal, the Participation Model is designed to help people with disabilities get the assistive equipment and devices they need.

How did the research occur?

This study involved a survey and interviews. The survey was sent out to everyone who had provided his or her contact information to EATI. People could take the survey online, complete a paper-version of the survey, or contact the researchers to complete the survey by telephone. 408 people took the survey. A request to participate in an interview was also sent out. 182 people signed up to be interviewed and 16 people were randomly selected to participate. 8 additional interviews were also held with people who are closely connected to EATI (called *key informants*) and could provide information concerning the program based on their experiences.

Key Findings

- EATI is having a large impact on people with disabilities. People reported 'getting out in the community more,' 'doing fun things,' and feeling more 'confident' in their abilities. AT was also reported to help participants 'volunteer,' 'develop new skills,' 'communicate,' 'get a job' and 'move towards employment.'
- EATI is flexible and provides funding for different types of AT. Much of this is due to the relationship of the community (BCPSN) and government (MSD) partners and their focus on making decisions together in keeping with the Participation Model.
- Almost all EATI participants received AT they needed and the majority of participants continue to use their AT often. This suggests the Participation Model's focus on the involvement of program participants in the selection and assessment process is working to meet peoples' needs.
- Self-assessments make up just over one third (35.6%) of all assessments. Assessments for AT that involve program participants and professionals occur most often. These collaborative assessments almost always lead to participants getting the assistive technology they believe they needed.

Conclusion

EATI is changing lives by providing assistive technology to support people with disabilities in their movement towards employment. It is impacting their lives in other ways as well. There are many important parts of this program, including the opportunity for self-assessment, the relationship between the community and government partners, and the Participation Model. Together, these things have helped EATI to become an effective way for helping people with disabilities get the assistive technology they need.