



TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY POLICY HIGHLIGHTS – SEPTEMBER 2020

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OVERVIEW

In September, National Preparedness Month was celebrated. Many counties, cities, and nonprofits across the country took the opportunity to virtually educate citizens on the importance of being prepared in the event of a local or national emergency. And the celebrations continued with the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the *Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010* (CVAA). They hosted a discussion panel composed of several prominent members, including the Deputy Chief of the FCC, co-chairs of the Disability Advisory Committee, and the Disability Rights Office Chief. The panel highlighted the progress made towards accessibility since the passage of the CVAA. **The [Recording of the Live Event](#)** is available.

In Wireless RERC news, we submitted [comments](#) to the Department of Commerce in response to their Public Notice *NTIA Internet Use Survey Questionnaire Development* [**Docket No. 200813-0218**]. The comments recommended that NTIA include additional questions related to the Internet of Things (IoT) devices, services, and use cases. We also published our third [Biennial Review of Mobile Phone Accessibility](#), quantifying accessibility levels of mobile phones available in the U.S. market as of February 2020, and a [policy brief](#) that summarizes the FCC's response to COVID-19 and its implications for people with disabilities. Finally, we continue data collection for our [2020 Survey of User Needs](#). If you have not already, please take the [survey](#).

Our newsletter also highlights upcoming virtual events related to wireless technology and people with disabilities. The 46th Annual American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity (AAAED) is still hosting [bimonthly virtual sessions](#). Within our newsletter, you can find the topics of October's virtual conference workshops. Also forthcoming is the [Sight Tech Global conference](#), which is free to attend. Registration is open now.

This issue also includes news about broadband network hardening, a music app, accessible voting, disability awareness, assistive technologies, wearables, and more.

REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

THE CVAA TURNS 10!

September 14, 2020 — The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA) with a discussion panel composed of several prominent members including the Deputy Chief of the FCC, co-chairs of the Disability Advisory Committee, and the Chief of the Disability Rights Office. The panel highlighted the progress made towards accessibility since the passage of the CVAA. Subsequently, the event will share the winners' names for the Chairman's Awards for Advancement in Accessibility (Chairman's AAA). These winners will be individuals that have made significant contributions to the "rapid, efficient nationwide communication service." [Source: FCC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Recording of Live Event](#)

<https://youtu.be/8gBHAKAFgMY>

[FCC to Honor 10th Anniversary of Accessibility Act With Oct. 8 Event](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-honor-10th-anniversary-accessibility-act-oct-8-event>

PUBLIC NOTICE REGARDING THE AUTHORIZATION OF PUERTO RICO BROADBAND FUNDS

September 15, 2020 – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) published a Public Notice [**WC Docket Nos. 18-143, 10-90**] that authorized financial support to T-Mobile for Stage 2 of the Uniendo, a Puerto Rico Fund. Earlier this summer, the FCC published a Public Notice [**WC Docket Nos 18-143, 10-90**] and a Press Release on the authorization of \$258.8 million for expansion, improvement, and hardening of broadband networks in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). These funds were approved for a three-year window to achieve these aims. Specifically, \$233.9 million will be directed to Uniendo Puerto Rico Fund for the three carriers serving Puerto Rico and to the Connect USVI Fund for \$4 million to the one carrier serving the USVI (Stage 2, FCC). From the \$258.8 million, \$59.5 million of this funding has been earmarked specifically for 5G deployment in all the U.S. territories.

Since 2018, the FCC has looked into the impact of post-disaster power outages on people with disabilities' access to communications systems (including wireline, wireless, satellite, broadcast, and cable networks). Puerto Rico experienced longer-term outages after Hurricane Maria in 2017, so it is encouraging to see progress towards these networks' resiliency. This latest Public Notice shares that the FCC approved the Disaster Preparation and Response Plan that T-Mobile submitted based on the appropriate criteria outlined in the *PR-USVI Stage 2 Order*. The Stage 2 Order requires mobile carriers

to indicate how they would comply with the five following criteria (1) Strengthening Infrastructure; (2) Ensuring Network Diversity; (3) Ensuring Backup Power; (4) Network Monitoring; and (5) Emergency Preparedness. All mobile carriers had approved plans, and funds were disbursed. These carriers are restricted to using the funding for "only the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities and services for which the support is intended," which in this case is the improvement, expansion, and hardening of broadband networks. The approval of T-Mobile's plan shows that they followed all the above-outlined criteria. T-Mobile has now received approximately \$15 million in funding for implementing 4G LTE or better; roughly \$5 million for creating 5G or better service for a total support amount of \$20 million for this fiscal year [Source FCC].

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[WCB Authorizes Stage 2 Mobile Support for T-Mobile in Puerto Rico](#)

<https://www.fcc.gov/document/wcb-authorizes-stage-2-mobile-support-t-mobile-puerto-rico>

WIRELESS RERC UPDATES

THE FCC'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

September 30, 2020 – The Wireless RERC published a policy brief that summarized and assessed the Federal Communications Commissions' (FCC) response to COVID-19. The FCC's policies and regulations had the opportunity to profoundly shape digital experiences and social outcomes for Americans with disabilities. However, the FCC's response must be met with an equal effort by other stakeholders to fully realize the intended outcomes. Finally, the policy brief identifies and describes the implications of these policies for people with disabilities. Some of the evaluated policies and regulations include the Keep Americans Connected Pledge, the Lifeline Program, and Telehealth funding for healthcare providers. [Source: Wireless RERC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[*The Federal Communication Commissions' Response to COVID-19: Implications for People with Disabilities*](#)

[http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/publications/fcc_policy_brief -
_the_federal_communication_commissions_response_to_covid-19.pdf](http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/publications/fcc_policy_brief_-_the_federal_communication_commissions_response_to_covid-19.pdf)

2020 MOBILE PHONE ACCESSIBILITY REVIEW REVEALS PAIN POINTS & PROGRESS

September 2020 - The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Wireless Inclusive Technologies (Wireless RERC) published its third [Biennial Review of Mobile Phone Accessibility](#), quantifying accessibility levels of mobile phones available in the U.S. market as of February 2020. The study analyzed 141 phones from the Tier 1 wireless carriers (e.g., Verizon and Sprint), one prepaid carrier, and five Lifeline Carriers. The Review assessed the presence of 35 features associated with device accessibility for people with disabilities. This report supplies an analysis of mobile phone accessibility features across the sample, including disability type, and comparative analyses based on phone type (smartphone compared to non-smartphone), the data collection period (2017 compared to 2019/20), and carrier types (Tier 1 compared to Lifeline providers). Major findings include:

- In the aggregate, there was growth in accessibility features for people with a wide range of disabilities. Upon disaggregating the data, except for some features for vision disabilities, the sampled mobile phones in 2019/20 outperformed the sampled phones in 2017 in the hearing, cognitive, mobility and dexterity disability categories.
- There was an increase in the percentage of phones with features available for people with cognitive disabilities, including significant increases in the presence of text-to-speech, full access screen readers, and biometric log-in.
- The growth of accessibility features between 2017 and 2019 shows a shift towards integrating novel and more advanced technology.
- Smartphones outperformed non-smartphones in the percentage of accessibility features present, pulling higher percentages for 26 of the 35 features examined, showing that smartphones not only have a greater variety of accessibility features, but they outperform non-smartphones in many categories of accessibility.
- Compared to the hearing aid compatibility (HAC) ratings found in 2017, the percentage of HAC compliant phones noticeably improved. The ratings shifted from most devices falling into the M3/T3 category in 2017, to a majority of the mobile phones landing into the M4/T3 rating in 2019/20.
- Data showed that having more than one disability (i.e., comorbidity) makes identifying a suitable mobile device more complex, particularly if the concurrent disability has a fewer number of associated mobile device accessibility features.
- Tier 1 provided mobile phones outperformed Lifeline provider phone models.
- Despite Tier 1 phone models outperforming Lifeline-provided models on the presence of accessibility features, there is a more encouraging finding that shows 2019/2020 devices obtained from Lifeline providers have improved accessibility levels compared to 2017 data.

- The data indicates that WEA-capable devices have more accessibility options than non-WEA-capable phone models, and the percentage of WEA-capable phones increased from 35% in 2017 to 74% in 2019.

In response to these findings, we offered several recommendations. Foremost, as new features are developed, mobile phone manufacturers are encouraged to continue incorporating users with disabilities into all stages of the design process so that accessibility and consequential usability are intentional within designs instead of a fortuitous byproduct of innovative technology. Also, with mobile phones of all types dominating how we communicate, manufacturers should continue expanding options that allow customizability of devices and services for individual user needs and preferences. [Source: Wireless RERC]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[*Biennial Review of Mobile Phone Accessibility*](#)

http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/publications/2020_analysis_of_mobile_phones_final.pdf

WIRELESS RERC ON THE RECORD: NTIA INTERNET SURVEY COMMENTS ON QUESTIONS

September 17, 2020 – The Wireless RERC, in collaboration with Georgia Tech’s Center for the Development and Application of Internet of Things Technologies and Center for Advanced Communications Policy, submitted comments to the Department of Commerce on September 17th in response to their Public Notice *NTIA Internet Use Survey Questionnaire Development* [Docket No. 200813-0218]. This survey is one of the NTIA’s long-standing questionnaires and is distributed to approximately 50,000 homes across the United States. It supplements the periodically administered Current Population Survey (CPS) that gauges national labor force statistics and provides digital use information. The Wireless RERC’s comments noted concerns about the nature of some of the survey questions that may cause respondents to provide less than accurate answers due to social standing. Other concerns related to the survey questions included wariness about how questions are worded. They may not be clear to people with mild cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, or for whom English is a second language.

The RERC also recommended that NTIA should include additional questions to the NTIA Internet Use Survey. We argued that it would be useful to have questions related to Internet of Things (IoT) devices, services, and use cases. In our comments, we explicitly name one set of IoT-related devices that have not been assessed in the NTIA Survey: voice input devices (such as Amazon Echo or Apple Siri). These devices’ deployment is prominent, particularly in smart homes and for those with disabilities who use the technology to navigate their environment. We suggested that NTIA probe

into accessibility, perceptions, and barriers to the adoption of these devices. Two other areas that we suggest the NTIA Survey expound on include survey participants' characteristics, accessibility and usability of technology, and accessibility of emergency and governmental services (such as IPAWS). Finally, the RERC suggests that questions about wearables, the complexity of their use, and devices' cost are added to the survey. This invaluable information would allow neutral authorities to develop technological and policy interventions. Our comments to the Department of Commerce conclude by emphasizing how vital it is for surveys to be accessible to people with disabilities to ensure data collection is inclusive of these populations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Read the Comments - Internet Use Survey Questionnaire Development](#)

http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/cacpqt_response_to_ntia_request_for_comments_docket_no._200813-0218.pdf

PLEASE TAKE AND SHARE THE LATEST SURVEY OF USER NEEDS!

The SUN is the Wireless RERC's cornerstone survey on wireless technology use by people with disabilities.

Your responses will:

- Help designers and engineers make more accessible wireless devices, features, and services for people with disabilities, and
- Inform recommendations to better ensure inclusive policies and practices.



If you have a disability, please consider taking this survey. If you know someone who has a disability, please send the survey to them.

Take the survey online at <http://bit.ly/wRERC-SUN2020>, or

Scan the QR Code to open the survey on your mobile device, or

Take the survey via phone, call 404-839-8741.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

September 2020 – In September, National Preparedness Month serves as an opportunity to bring awareness to emergency preparedness as each state, locality, and district prompts conversation around disaster readiness and informs citizens of the importance of being prepared. The theme this year was, “Disasters Don’t Wait, Make Your Plan Today.” This year, the New York City Emergency

Management Department hosted a series of virtual events to educate the public about the importance of preparedness. Some of the weekly themed events included: Make a Plan, Build a Kit, Prepare for Disasters, and Teach Youth about Preparedness. New York City's Emergency Management Department also partnered with nonprofit and faith-based organizations to share critical information and host panel discussions for more in-depth discussions on collaborative response efforts. On September 24th, the agency hosted a virtual panel discussion with disability advocates called "Voices of the Disabled: Planning for Emergencies" to highlight and address the unique challenges that people with disabilities encounter while planning and responding.

In Southern California, virtual events were also held. The City of Malibu hosted several virtual preparedness panels, training, and drills. One such event occurred on September 28th. The City of Malibu hosted the Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) presentation that provides specific information on what to do in an emergency if there is a widespread power outage. Similar to cities, counties also hosted their own events. In Hays County, San Marcos (TX), the Hays County Office of Emergency Services (OES) hosted their annual Preparedness Fair virtually. Virtual participants received disaster-related and emergency planning scenario-based techniques. During National Preparedness Month, the Red Cross, a nonprofit organization, hosted free virtual preparedness presentations that covered a variety of topics such as Preparing for Disasters: Get a Kit, Make a Plan, and Be informed; Wildfire Preparedness; Earthquake Preparedness; Home Fire Preparedness; and a Game Night! At the Game Night, virtual participants were able to put their preparedness knowledge to the test. [Sources: Homeland Security Today; Press Release Desk via Patch; Event-News Enterprise Staff; SM Corridor News]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Hays County Annual Preparedness Fair Going Virtual](https://smcorridornews.com/hays-county-annual-preparedness-fair-going-virtual/)

<https://smcorridornews.com/hays-county-annual-preparedness-fair-going-virtual/>

[Red Cross to Offer Free Classes this September for National Preparedness Month](https://www.redcross.org/local/california/los-angeles/about-us/news-and-events/press-releases/red-cross-to-offer-free-classes-this-september---for-national-p.html)

<https://www.redcross.org/local/california/los-angeles/about-us/news-and-events/press-releases/red-cross-to-offer-free-classes-this-september---for-national-p.html>

[NYC Emergency Management Kicks Off National Preparedness Month to Educate New Yorkers About Disaster Readiness](https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/nyc-emergency-management-kicks-off-national-preparedness-month-to-educate-new-yorkers-about-disaster-readiness/)

<https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/nyc-emergency-management-kicks-off-national-preparedness-month-to-educate-new-yorkers-about-disaster-readiness/>

[Public Safety Power Shutoffs Presentation In Malibu](#)

<https://patch.com/california/malibu/malibu-2020-national-preparedness-month-public-safety-power-shutoffs-psps>

CLASSICAL MUSIC APP WINS UNIVERSAL DESIGN AWARD

September 2020 – The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)-Mphasis is one of India’s leading disability advocacy groups. Every year, they announce the highly anticipated Universal Design Award for people who develop accessible and universal designs for people with disabilities in various disciplines, from assistive technology to mobility and independent living. This year, Sandeep Ranade won the NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Award. Sandeep designed NaadSadhana, an app that allows people with hearing and vision disabilities to vocally train in classical Indian music. Sandeep described their app as a tool that allows users to be a ‘guru’ who can consistently correct their notes. In developing this model, the app becomes an expansive learning system that is constantly improving. [Source: NewzHook]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[#InclusionChamps -‘Do your part to help overcome barriers’, says Sandeep Ranade, Winner, Universal Design Awards 2020](#)

<https://newzhook.com/story/ncpedp-mphasis-naadsadhana-vision-hearing-impaired-classical-music-app-accessibility-amar-jain-inclusionchamps-do-you-part-to-help-overcome-barriers-says-sandeep-ranade-winner-universal-design-awards/>

AFB SHARES IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PEOPLE WITH VISION DISABILITIES

September 29, 2020 — The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) recently released a comprehensive report on the impact of COVID-19 on people with visual disabilities in the following subject areas: healthcare, employment, social experiences, education, transportation, voting, access to food, meals, and supplies. In this study of 1,921 U.S. participants, 92% of participants indicated that they had access to technology. However, many participants expressed that this access to technology did not mean access to information. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of participants shared that they were concerned that visual information about COVID-19 on television was not accessible to them. As a result of needing vital information relating to COVID-10, 80% of participants indicated that they have increased their use of assistive technology apps such as Aira and Be My Eyes.

Participants had varying levels of agreement to “increased use of apps designed to connect people with visual impairments with sighted assistance.” Seventeen percent (17%) of female participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to only 9% of males. The statement also received higher agreement levels from those who were blind (20%) compared to those with low

vision (6%). COVID-19 has also altered how some participants utilize visual-interpreting services. Some respondents shared that they use visual-interpreting services to verify the location of items delivered to their home and to read and enter CAPTCHA information on websites [p. 24]. Technology was used differently to create social connections between people with visual impairments. Eight hundred eight participants shared that they contacted other people with vision disabilities in their personal network for COVID-19 support, while 785 did not reach out to any organized group for support or support for information. Some of AFB recommendations are provided below:

- Any government agency distributing information about the coronavirus should provide equivalent levels of access to people with vision disabilities.
- Information presented in graphical forms, such as maps and bar graphs, need to provide text equivalents.
- Product developers should incorporate digital accessibility into products as the products are initially being developed.
- Provision should be made for visual interpreting services, such as Aira and Be My Eyes, to ensure that people with limited financial resources can take advantage of these services.

The report also shares the most up-to-date and salient findings on technology use, technology tools used, app/programs used, and other concerns. This report is comprehensive in the six major subject matters. The survey was distributed across a diverse demographic of people with visual disabilities. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the respondents were White, 7% were Hispanic/LatinX, 6.7% were Black, 3% were Asian. The report is publicly available, as are the earlier releases of results. [Source: AFB]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Flatten Inaccessibility](#)

<https://flatteninaccessibility.com/results.html#installment-3>

<https://flatteninaccessibility.com/results.html#table-of-contents>

ANOTHER COUNTY MAKES VOTING MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

September 21, 2020 – Vermilion County’s (Illinois) Accessible vote by Mail (AVBM) feature for people with disabilities went live on September 24th. The AVBM feature is available for the 2020 General Election. This software allows voters with disabilities to vote privately and independently. Vermilion County voters who qualify for this service can receive their ballot electronically, mark it using assistive technology, print the completed ballot, and return it to the Vermilion County Clerk’s Office via USPS or hand-delivery. The Vermilion County Clerk’s Office also noted that voters with mobility disabilities, or any other form, may opt for curbside voting if they are unable to get into the building.

However, to use this service, voters must make an appointment before arriving to ensure staffing is available. [Source: Jordan Crook via Newsbug]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Vermilion County Clerk announces new accessible vote by mail](#)

https://www.newsbug.info/hoopeston_chronicle/vermilion-county-clerk-announces-new-accessible-vote-by-mail/article_7c2e05c2-e148-5020-becf-444ab71b5ff9.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=user-share

RELIEF FUNDING FOR WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY AT PUBLIC LIBRARIES

September 21, 2020 – Governor Tim Wolf (Pennsylvania) recently granted state libraries \$15 million in grant relief funding to expand broadband services to their local communities. Of the \$15 million distributed to state libraries, approximately \$1.4 million will be designated for internet connectivity in “high need” geographic areas. These “high need” areas tend to be rural and remote. Another \$100,000 will be allocated towards “strengthen[ing] and expand[ing] the existing 24/7 online homework help through the POWER Library Chat with a Librarian service.” The fund will also use a multidimensional framework to ensure that children who have multiple siblings or people in their homes attending virtual classrooms have access to remote learning. This approach will use various resources, including state library networks and the Pennsylvania Technical Training and Assistance, to ensure students can have appropriate broadband access levels. Another \$8 million of the relief funding will provide educational content delivered via television and Pennsylvania PBS for students who cannot access online learning material. The relief fund also distributes \$2 million towards assistive technology for students with disabilities. [Domenic Cuzzolina via Altoona Mirror]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[State to fund tech updates through local libraries](#)

<https://www.altoonamirror.com/news/local-news/2020/09/state-to-fund-tech-updates-through-local-libraries/>

DISABILITY AWARENESS CELEBRATED AT ANNUAL GEORGIA TECH CONFERENCE

September 16, 2020 – The 12th Annual Georgia Tech Diversity Symposium, *Understanding Accessibility as Inclusion: Georgia Tech’s Pathway to Accessibility*, was hosted virtually for the first time since the start of the program. The event focused on going beyond disability awareness and incorporating disability acceptance. The conversation at the event also emphasized the importance of disability awareness to diversity and inclusion, and the campus community. One of the keynote speakers, Haben Girma, the first person who is deaf-blind to graduate from Harvard Law School,

discussed releasing the notion that disabilities are a burden. She encouraged the audience to reframe what disability means and the benefits of choosing inclusion. Other panels at the Symposium focused on disability access technologies, research, development, and design. The event concluded with the annual awards ceremony where the Faces of Inclusive Excellence and Diversity Champion Awards were announced. The recipients include:

- Cassie S. Mitchell, Assistant Professor I Biomedical Engineering
- Johan "John" Rempel UX/ICT Quality Assurance Manager
- CIDI (Staff Winner)
- Writing and Communication Program; Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts School of Literature, Media, and Communications (Unit Winner)

[Source: Courtney Hill via Georgia Tech News]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[2020 Georgia Tech Diversity Symposium Focuses on Disability Awareness and Inclusion](https://news.gatech.edu/2020/09/17/2020-georgia-tech-diversity-symposium-focuses-disability-awareness-and-inclusion)

<https://news.gatech.edu/2020/09/17/2020-georgia-tech-diversity-symposium-focuses-disability-awareness-and-inclusion>

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES AROUND THE WORLD

September 13, 2020 – Across the world, technological advancements are being made that increase workplace inclusion and expand accessibility for people with disabilities to daily life. In South Africa, Technovera, a startup, developed the Pelebox Smart Lockers. These smart lockers are now a part of the healthcare infrastructure that delivers daily medicine to patients in minutes. No longer do patients have to stand in lines for hours at clinics to receive their medicine. Now they can quickly obtain their medicine in pre-packaged containers. While in Singapore, SHINEseniors is a project that aims to place the elderly in smart homes to maintain independence and support aging in place. These smart homes can track daily activity while maintaining privacy. In India, Tellmate, a mobile phone app, helps people with vision disabilities navigate their surroundings by sending sounds to wearables worn on the ear. It can also read printed texts. Avaz is another assistive technology developed in India. Avaz provides pictures and text lessons for children with developmental disabilities to assist with developing communication skills.

The Sunu Band (Mexico) uses echolocation and vibrations through a wearable device to serve as a guide for people with vision-related disabilities. The Band automatically syncs with a mobile phone so people can get live guidance. Finally, a Chinese company, Keenon, constructed a disinfection robot. The robot can clean a single room in 15 minutes and can navigate on its own. [Source: Borgen Magazine]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Technological Inventions Worldwide Aid Disabled Communities](https://www.borgenmagazine.com/disabled-communities/)

<https://www.borgenmagazine.com/disabled-communities/>

DIGITAL SHOWCASE HIGHLIGHTS LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN TECH

September 11, 2020 – Taiwanese mobility distributors recently hosted a digital showcase of their assistive technology and devices. The four companies who participated in the virtual event, Gigantex, iXensor, Leadtek, and Merits, released various innovations. Gigantex Composite Technologies Ltd. displayed their carbon fiber, which is the material used to create their lightweight wheelchair. It is said to be a newer variation of Carbon Black's design. Other products that were showcased include manual and powered wheelchairs and technology-enabled healthcare devices. Gigantex also released its MF012 wheelchair model that can easily fold and is described as "one of the lightest folding wheelchairs in the market." While Merits Health Products Ltd. highlighted the range of their compact folding power chairs. [Source: Calvin Barnett via THIIS]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Opportunity for mobility distributors to find new products as manufacturers launch digital showcase](https://thiis.co.uk/opportunity-for-mobility-distributors-to-find-new-products-as-manufacturers-launch-digital-showcase)

<https://thiis.co.uk/opportunity-for-mobility-distributors-to-find-new-products-as-manufacturers-launch-digital-showcase/>

WEARABLE GLOVE IMITATES SENSE OF TOUCH

September 9, 2020 – The University of New South Wales created a wearable that has haptic sensations through soft, miniature artificial "muscles" located in the glove's material. The wearable imitates the sensation of touch. The researchers shared many scenarios in which the sense of touch would be useful but impossible. One such example would be during a telehealth consultation. The physical therapist or chiropractic doctor may want to assess a patient's strength after an accident. Both the client and the physician would put on a haptic glove, and the client would complete a task such as picking up an object. The haptic glove contains a three-way directional SSD (skin stretch device), which would communicate with the doctor's glove with physical pressure on the fingers. The glove of the doctor would use the 3D force sensors to measure these interactions. Therefore, if a patient has poor mobility and grip of an object, the doctor can tangibly measure the function level in a virtual setting. The researchers shared that this technology could also address challenges encountered in emerging systems like remote surgeries, self-driving cars, and the guidance of human movement. [Source: Asha Barbaschow via ZDNet]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[UNSW announces a glove to mimic touch and a grant for VR-based spinal cord injury relief](https://www.zdnet.com/google-amp/article/unsw-announces-a-glove-to-mimic-touch-and-a-grant-for-vr-based-spinal-cord-injury-relief/)

<https://www.zdnet.com/google-amp/article/unsw-announces-a-glove-to-mimic-touch-and-a-grant-for-vr-based-spinal-cord-injury-relief/>

DISABILITY INCLUSION EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED IN ASIA PACIFIC

September 9, 2020 – Microsoft launched a ‘first-of-its-kind’ program in the Asia Pacific region to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, provide artificial intelligence (AI) training, and accessibility education for partnering companies. The program is entitled Microsoft Enabler Program (MEP) and seeks to help develop inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities in the region. The MEP program will be piloted in five countries: Thailand, Singapore, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) who specialize in inclusive workplace training will provide instruction to organizations and companies who commit to MEP. Employers who enroll in the MEP program will learn about inclusive workplaces and complete a course by Microsoft Learn, entitled Accessibility Fundamental, which will teach inclusive design principles. The collaborating NPOs for this project include:

- Be.Lab (New Zealand);
- JA Korea; KODAF (Korea Differently Abled Federation);
- SG Enable (Singapore);
- The Redemptorist Foundation for People with Disabilities (Thailand);
- and Virtualahan (Philippines).

These NPOs will guide the following employing partners: Cloocus (Korea); Cognizant Technology Solutions (Singapore, Philippines); Crayon (Singapore, Philippines); Datacom (New Zealand); DXC Technology (New Zealand); ePLDT (Philippines); HCL Technologies (Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, New Zealand); Ingram Micro Asia (Singapore); Metanet Tplatform (Korea); Nexus Tech (Philippines); NTT Asia Pacific; NTT Data (Singapore, Philippines); Tech Data (Singapore); Wipro (Singapore, Philippines, Thailand). The program is set to begin in 2021, and by the second quarter of 2021, MEP will also include a virtual job fair component that allows for networking across Microsoft partners and NPOs. [Source: Bob Glancy via Microsoft News]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Microsoft, Nonprofits and employer partners launch program to increase employability for people with disabilities in Asia Pacific](https://news.microsoft.com/en-nz/2020/09/09/microsoft-non-profits-and-employer-partners-launch-program-to-increase-employability-for-people-with-disabilities-in-asia-pacific/)

<https://news.microsoft.com/en-nz/2020/09/09/microsoft-non-profits-and-employer-partners-launch-program-to-increase-employability-for-people-with-disabilities-in-asia-pacific/>

NEW GRANT PROVIDES PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

September 9, 2020 – The Iowa Able Foundation provides monetary resources for people with disabilities to assist them in becoming financially independent. The Foundation recently received a federal grant for \$350,000, which will aid their efforts in providing affordable lending and education programs for assistive technology. Often, people with disabilities face challenges in locating assistive technologies and purchasing the equipment. In the past, the Iowa Able Foundation has helped people with disabilities purchase technology such as vehicles with accessible accommodations, educational technology outfitted with software that makes the device accessible, and employment equipment like modifying farming machinery or sewing machines. [Source: Business Record Staff]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Iowa Able Foundation receives \\$350,000 grant for assistive technology program](https://businessrecord.com/Content/Culture/Culture/Article/Iowa-Able-Foundation-receives-350-000-grant-for-assistive-technology-program/170/832/91215)

<https://businessrecord.com/Content/Culture/Culture/Article/Iowa-Able-Foundation-receives-350-000-grant-for-assistive-technology-program/170/832/91215>

WEARABLE DEVICE AS A GUIDE IN UNFAMILIAR ENVIRONMENTS

September 2, 2020 – The Wayband is a haptic based assistive device worn around one's wrist that aids people with vision disabilities to navigate their environment independently. The Wayband was created by the tech company, WearWorks, who partnered with a runner who is blind to create the features and structures of the wristband. The haptic device transmits information about the person's surroundings via vibrations that help the user create a mental map of their environment. If the user of the Wayband begins to stray too far from their unobstructed path, then the device will discreetly vibrate to let them know that they need to rechart their path. Specifically, the device's vibrations' intensity provides guidance on the user's proximity to an object. To operate the Wayband, the user must connect the device to a pairing app. The product is currently in prototyping and testing phases, and WearWorks anticipates releasing it in 2021. [Source: Dan Tham via CNN]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Wearable tech helps this blind runner compete in ultramarathons](https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/09/02/app-tech-section/simon-wheatcroft-wayband-tech-for-good-spc-intl/index.html)

<https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/09/02/app-tech-section/simon-wheatcroft-wayband-tech-for-good-spc-intl/index.html>

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

September 2, 2020 – As the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed higher education institutions into a virtual setting, universities are considering how to serve all their students best. The University of

Montana, through the MonTECH program, is providing free 30-day loans of educational technology and assistive technology to students with disabilities. They are in the process of obtaining an adequate supply of iPads and tablets, telepresence robots, broadband hotspots, and more. MonTECH also anticipates hosting several webinars throughout the year for teachers to highlight all the available tools to ensure an accessible classroom. [Source: PublicNewsService]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Assistive Tech 'Lifeline' for MT Students with Disabilities During Pandemic](https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2020-09-02/disabilities/assistive-tech-lifeline-for-mt-students-with-disabilities-during-pandemic/a71324-1)

<https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2020-09-02/disabilities/assistive-tech-lifeline-for-mt-students-with-disabilities-during-pandemic/a71324-1>

UPCOMING EVENTS

DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

The Disability Advisory Committee will be virtually hosting its fourth meeting on Wednesday, October 14, 2020, at 1:30 pm (EST). At this meeting, the Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) will discuss recently submitted reports and recommendations from its subcommittees. The DAC may also entertain issues regarding communications transitions, telecommunications relay services, emergency access, and video programming accessibility. The meeting will be open to the public, will include American Sign Interpreters and Open Captioning. The public can make comments and inquiries, but they must submit their questions and comments to the email livequestions@fcc.gov.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[DAC Meeting Information](https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2020/10/disability-advisory-committee-meeting)

<https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2020/10/disability-advisory-committee-meeting>

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE COVERS A MYRIAD OF DISABILITY-RELATED TOPICS

The American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity (AAAED) hosts its 46th national conference, but this year it will be completely virtual. The theme of this year's annual conference is "Turning Obstacles into Opportunities." The conference commenced on June 23rd with a virtual summit, and Mickey Silberman, Esq., of Silberman Law gave the keynote address. Thereafter, the conference hosted two subsequent plenary panels named "ADA Thirtieth Anniversary: Celebration and Challenges" and "The Internet and Beyond: Federal Intervention and the Future of Work." On June 25th, they hosted the first of sixteen Virtual sessions that are bi-monthly until December 16th.

Upcoming sessions include:

November 3 Virtual Session #11

“The Intersection between Title IX Compliance and Prevention Education”

Vicky Kulicke, CAAP, University of Toledo

Lindsay A. Tuttle, University of Toledo

November 4 Virtual Session #12

“Workplace Accommodations: Etiquette & Enlightened Sensitivity”

Tracey Hamilton, Temple University

Janet D. Fiore, CEO, The Sierra Group

November 18 Virtual Session #13

“Behind the Scenes: Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Managing Your Organization During an Agency Review”

Cheri Burgess, Princeton University

Sam Starks, University of Pennsylvania

December 2 Virtual Session #14

“Impacting Perceptions: Evolving Views of Social Identities to Promote Inclusion”

Hailima Yates, CEO/Founder, Luv Mrk

December 10 Virtual Session #15

“What EEOC and OFCCP Trends Tell us About Compliance Readiness”

Sandra Hueneman, Sr. CAAP, President, Manchester Consultants & AAAED Treasurer

December 16 Virtual Session #16

“Strategic Planning for EO/AA Complaint Investigations”

Joyce Pratt, T&J Associates of New Jersey LLC

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[Conference Agenda](#)

https://www.aaaed.org/aaaed/Conference_Agenda1.asp

[Conference Registration](#)

<https://www.aaaed.org/aaaed/Registration.asp>

ACCESSING HIGHER GROUND CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS EQUITY AND INCLUSION

If you missed Haben Girma, the keynote speaker at Georgia Tech’s Diversity Symposium, then there is still a chance to hear her speak! This year, the Accessing Higher Ground: Accessible Media, Web, and Technology Conference will also have Haben Girma as a keynote speaker. The conference is scheduled to take place virtually from November 9, 2020 – November 19, 2020. During the pre-conference, there will be numerous panels covering a variety of topics from “Adobe InDesign Layouts to Produce to Accessible PDFs” to “Introduction to Mobile Assistive Technology and Accessibility Testing.” During the main conference, a series of events will cover a range of topics such as “Equity in the Classroom: Ensuring Open Educational Resources [OER] are Accessible to Everyone” to “Pivot to Online Accessibility and Accommodations.” For ATHEN & AHEAD members, the conference fees

are \$288, while for non-members, the conference is \$360. Registration is open now! [Source: Accessing Higher Ground]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
[Accessing Higher Ground](#)

<http://www.cvent.com/events/accessing-higher-ground-2020-virtual-conference/event-summary-4993aa597fc14cbe9ebe3f2ebf4d1e73.aspx>

GLOBAL CONFERENCE FOR VISION ACCESSIBILITY

The annual Sight Tech Global event will occur virtually this year from December 2-3. This year's conference's primary focus is the future impact of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies on the development of assistive technology and accessibility. Specifically, the conference will highlight the next generation of screen readers and the accessibility implications for people with blindness and other vision-related disabilities. Glen Gordon will be a speaker at this year's conference. Glen Gordon is the architect of Job Access with Speech (JAWS), an assistive technology that provides navigation of Windows PCs with output in speech and Braille. In a press release statement, Gordon discussed the latest release of JAWS and its newest voice commands, streamlined access to image descriptions, and the ability of JAWS, Zoom Text, and Fusion to use natural language processing for verbal commands. The Sight Tech Global conference is free to attend, and registration is open now. [Source: Ned Desmond via Tech Crunch]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

[JAWS architect Glen Gordon is joining Sight Tech Global, a virtual event Dec. 2-3](#)

<https://techcrunch.com/2020/09/16/jaws-architect-glen-gordon-is-joining-sight-tech-global-a-virtual-event-dec-2-3/>

TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY POLICY HIGHLIGHTS, SEPTEMBER 2020

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The Technology and Disability Policy Highlights (TDPH) is a monthly newsletter that reports on national public policy events and tracks emerging issues of interest to individuals with disabilities, researchers, policymakers, industry, and advocacy professionals. The Wireless RERC is a research center that promotes universal access to wireless technologies and explores their innovative applications in addressing the needs, user experiences, and expectations of people with disabilities. For more information on the Wireless RERC, please visit our website at [\[http://www.wirelessrerc.org\]](http://www.wirelessrerc.org). For further information on items summarized in this report, or if you

have items of interest that you would like included in future editions, please contact this edition's editors Salimah LaForce [salimah@cacp.gatech.edu] or Dara Bright [dara.bright@cacp.gatech.edu]. If you wish to update your email address, send an email to salimah@cacp.gatech.edu.

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