

Assistive technologies market growing rapidly in US

December 6 2012, by Chris Casey

Assistive technology research and commercialization needs to greatly speed up, said the executive director of [Assistive Technology Partners](#) (ATP), because the demand for devices to help people with disabilities and the elderly is poised to explode as the population ages.

Cathy Bodine and her staff at ATP, part of the School of Medicine, hosted a lunch-and-learn for representatives of Colorado's congressional delegation on Tuesday. Also attending were Don Elliman, chancellor; Lilly Marks, vice president of health affairs at the University of Colorado and executive vice chancellor of the Anschutz Medical Campus; and Richard Krugman, MD, vice chancellor for [health affairs](#) for the University of Colorado Denver and dean of the School of Medicine.

Bodine explained that the U.S. market for assistive technologies is projected to grow from \$39.5 billion in 2010 to \$55 billion in 2016. The growth is fueled by an [aging population](#) as one in five people are expected to be 65 or older by 2035.

Bodine said ATP's 25 faculty and staff members are the "only lab in the world, to our knowledge so far, that combines all of the engineering disciplines with all of the allied health disciplines. ... It's a very unusual setup, but it's one that works incredibly well. And we've all learned to speak the same language, albeit it took a while."

ATP was founded in 1989 after the passage of the Technology Related

Assistance for Individuals with [Disabilities](#) Act. To date, ATP has generated more than \$35 million in federal and state grants, contracts and other fee-for-service activities for CU.

But U.S. policy has not kept pace with technology, Bodine said. "Technology is just exploding, but we have very archaic rules because of how it's been promulgated."

For example, she said, "iPads are about \$600 to \$800 and they can be used in many applications for disabilities as [communication tools](#). But the way (state Medicaid rules) are written, we're not allowed to pay for computers. So we spend \$10,000 on a communication device when a \$600 to \$800 device would work brilliantly."

Disparate funding sources in legislation has, in both early childhood and primary and secondary education settings, sometimes translated to lack of coverage for people with disabilities, Bodine said. One piece of legislation covers costs at such a low level that "at the very time when babies are able to learn the most they have the least amount of access to technology."

On the research side, Bodine said, major federal grant sources tend not to fund assistive technology related research programs.

She pointed out several pieces of legislation that are up for reauthorization by Congress. "All of them include assistive technology, but they don't necessarily place significant emphasis on it, except for the Assistive Technology Act, of course."

Elliman asked if Silicon Valley companies are being approached to work on cooperative projects related to assistive technology.

Bodine said new standards on telecommunications accessibility will soon

go into effect under the Americans with Disabilities Act, providing leverage for working with private firms. But still, "that market ... is not pulled together in a way that these companies can understand how it impacts their bottom line. If we could do that I think we could solve a lot of problems."

David Braddock, PhD, associate vice president of the University of Colorado System and executive director of the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, said more federal funding is needed to advance the technologies.

"There are people anxious to gain the training (in assistive technology), but there's no resource," he said. "I think it's a reasonable sell, even in the climate we have nationally now, to tie developmental and cognitive disabilities, in particular, to technology and get it put into the Developmental Disabilities Assistance Act and then get 10 to 15 of these universities to get a flow of resources, which could subcontract with Cathy's operation here."

He praised the work being done by ATP, which was recipient of the nation's first [Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Advancing Cognitive Technologies](#). "She's made a tremendous head start on the application of technology for people with disabilities," Braddock said. "There's no place in the country that's as far along as this team that Cathy leads right here."

Braddock said it's only a matter of time before the market for assistive devices and the technological advancements intersect to become a vibrant area of growth.

Several members of the audience thanked Bodine for the information, which they plan to take back to Washington, D.C.

In summary, Bodine said, the nation's health care situation is unsustainable. New approaches are necessary, and assistive technology is a critical part of the solution, she said. "There are lots of things we can do that are low cost or no cost, and certainly the return on investment is huge."

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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