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# Position Statement on Access to Communication Services and Supports: Concerns Regarding the Application of Restrictive “Eligibility” Policies

*National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe  
Disabilities*

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## About This Document

This position statement was developed by the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities. This position statement is an official policy of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. National Joint Committee member organizations and their respective representatives who prepared this statement include the American Association on Mental Retardation, Mary Ann Ronski; the American Occupational Therapy Association, Jane Rourk; the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Beth Mineo Mollica, Rose Sevcik, Diane Paul-Brown (ex officio), and Alex F. Johnson (monitoring vice president); the Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness, Lee McLean (chair); RESNA, Kevin Caves; TASH, Pat Mirenda and Martha Snell; and the United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, David Yoder. This statement was approved by ASHA's Legislative Council (LC4 2002) at the Spring 2002 meeting.

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## Introduction

Eligibility policies and practices often preclude children and adults with severe disabilities<sup>1</sup> from accessing needed communication services and supports. Communication services and supports may include instruction of individuals and their communication partners, assistive technology, and environmental modifications, and may be delivered through a variety of service delivery models.<sup>2</sup> The expected outcome of such services and supports is to increase or to prevent decline in the individual's meaningful participation in daily activities. Categorical denial of communication services and supports without consideration of a person's unique communication needs may violate federal statute, and may also violate state law, regulation, and policy.

## Position Statement

It is the position of the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities that eligibility for communication services and supports should be based on individual communication needs. Communication services and supports should be evaluated, planned, and provided by an interdisciplinary team with expertise in communication and language form, content, and function, as well as in augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Decisions regarding team composition, types, amounts, and duration of services provided, intervention setting, and service delivery models should be

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<sup>1</sup> Persons with severe disabilities include “persons with severe to profound mental retardation, autism, and other disorders that result in severe socio-communicative and cognitive communication impairments” (National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities, 1992, p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> Service delivery models include both direct service and “indirect,” consultative/collaborative service models, and any combination of these models identified as most appropriate to meet the individual's needs (See Paul-Brown & Caperton, 2001).

based on the individual's communication needs and preferences. Eligibility determinations based on a priori<sup>3</sup> criteria violate recommended practice principles by precluding consideration of individual needs. These a priori criteria include, but are not limited to: (a) discrepancies between cognitive and communication functioning; (b) chronological age; (c) diagnosis; (d) absence of cognitive or other skills purported to be prerequisites; (e) failure to benefit from previous communication services and supports; (f) restrictive interpretations of educational, vocational, and/or medical necessity; (g) lack of appropriately trained personnel; and (h) lack of adequate funds or other resources.

## References

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- Paul-Brown, D., & Caperton, C. (2001). Inclusive practices for preschool children with specific language impairments. In M. J. Guralnick (Ed.), *Early childhood inclusion: Focus on change* (pp. 433–463). Baltimore: Brookes.

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<sup>3</sup> a priori is defined as “made before or without examination and not supported by factual study” (Morris, 1981).