Brainstorming Ways to Bring Independence to People With Disabilities | CPD

Conference goers put together their vision for bringing assistive technology to people who need it. The need for assistive technology is great. It can make the difference between dependence and independence, going out or staying home, working or not working, using a computer or going without. Unfortunately, AT is unavailable to a lot of people for a lot of reasons—no insurance or incomplete insurance coverage, high cost, long waits between the time equipment is ordered to the day it is delivered. (Assistive technology is a catch-all term for anything that helps people with disabilities adapt to everyday living, from specialized garden tools and silverware to wheelchairs, computers and adaptive software.) A recent western states symposium brought representatives from fourteen states and Washington, D.C. together to discuss ways to bridge that gap. The Western States Symposium: Building a Regional Collaboration for AT Reuse conference was hosted by the Western States Planning Group, the Pass It On Center, and the National Assistive Technology Technical Assistance Partnership. The conference took place in Salt Lake City in March. The symposium included a tour of the Citizens Reutilizing Assistive Technology Equipment (CReATE), an enormous Utah facility where used mobility devices are refurbished and then matched with a new owner. CReATE is an initiative of the Utah Assistive Technology Program located in the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University. AT exchange and reuse programs have sprung up all over the nation. CReATE focuses on mobility; others may focus on computers or on making it easier for used equipment buyers and sellers to find each other. In the west, 16 states have reuse and/or device exchange programs, but they face some real obstacles. Liability concerns, the lack of space, transportation problems and