

*Technology and Handicapped People*

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# Foreword

Technology exerts a powerful influence over the lives of everyone, making life easier, more fulfilling, but sometimes more painful and frustrating. This statement is especially true for people with disabilities. The appropriate application of technologies to diminishing the limitations and extending the capabilities of disabled and handicapped persons is one of the prime social and economic goals of public policy.

The Federal Government is deeply involved in programs that affect the development and use of technologies for disabilities. programs cover research and development, marketing, provision and financing of technologies, civil rights and their enforcement, employment, transportation, health care, income maintenance, and independent living, to name only a few categories.

Congress and other institutions have become increasingly interested in questions of how well programs that directly or indirectly develop technologies and support their use have been performing. Concerns have been raised about consistency of objectives, conflicting incentives, and lack of appropriate distribution of technologies.

The Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources requested the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) to conduct a study of technologies for handicapped individuals. OTA and the requesting Committee both recognized the extremely broad and complex range of issues that could be addressed in such a study. Therefore, OTA conducted a planning study. Using the results of that study, OTA prepared a proposal for a full assessment on technology and handicapped people, which was approved by the Technology Assessment Board in September 1980.

The study examined the specific factors that affect the research and development, evaluation, diffusion and marketing, delivery, use, and financing of technologies directly related to disabled people. The problems and processes of the development and use of technologies were analyzed in the context of societal allocation of resources and the setting of goals for public policy. The study concentrated on two critical matching processes: between technological needs and technological capabilities; and between allocation goals or intentions and resource capabilities.

As is the case for all OTA assessments, this study was guided by an advisory panel, chaired by Dr. Daisy Tagliacozzo. In addition, a large number of other consultants, contractors, and reviewers contributed significantly. We are grateful for their many contributions. As with all OTA reports, however, the content is the responsibility of the Office and does not constitute consensus or endorsement by the advisory panel or by the Technology Assessment Board.

JOHN H. GIBBONS  
*Director*

## Advisory Panel on Technology and Handicapped People

Daisy Tagliacozzo, *Panel Chair*

*Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Harbor Campus*

Miriam K. Bazelon

*Washington, D.C.*

Tom Beauchamp

*Kennedy Institute—Center for Bioethics*

*Georgetown University*

Monroe Berkowitz

*Bureau of Economic Research*

*Rutgers University*

Henrik Blum

*University of California, Berkeley*

Frank Bowe

*Woodmere, N. Y.*

Jim Gallagher

*Martha Porter Graham Center*

*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

Melvin Glasser

*Committee for National Health Insurance*

Ralf Hotchkiss

*Oakland, Calif.*

John Kimberly

*Yale School of Organization and Management*

*Yale University*

Robert Leopold

*Department of Psychiatry*

*Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania*

LeRoy Levitt

*Mount Sinai Hospital*

A. Malachi Mixon, III

*Invacare Corp.*

Jacquelin Perry

*Rancho Los Amigos Hospital*

Barbara W. Sklar

*Mount Zion Hospital*

William Stason

*Veterans Administration and*

*Harvard School of Public Health*

Gregg Vanderheiden

*Trace Research and Development Center*

*University of Wisconsin*

Michael Zullo

*Corporate Partnership Program*

*U.S. Council for International Year of*

*Disabled Persons*

## OTA Project Staff—Technology and Handicapped People

Joyce C. Lashof\* and H. David Banta, \*\* *Assistant Director-,  
Health and Life Sciences Division, OTA*

H. David Banta\* and Clyde J. Behney, \*\* *Health Program Manager-*

Clyde J. Behney, *Project Director*  
Anne Kesselman Burns, *Analyst*  
Chester Strobe], *Analyst*  
Arthur F. Kohrman, *Congressional Fellow*  
Judith E. Randal, *Congressional Fellow*  
Kerry Britten Kemp, *Editor*

Virginia Cwalina, *Administrative Assistant*  
Nancy L. Kenney, *Secretary*  
Lorraine Gerbil Ferris, *Secretary††*  
Michael P. Hughes, *Secretary*  
Mary E. Harvey, *Secretary*

### *Special Consultants*

Stephen Chitwood, *George Washington University*  
Marvin Kornbluh, *Congressional Research Service*  
Mark Ozer, *George Washington University School of Medicine*

### *Principal Contractors*

Richard Beinecke, *Institute for New Challenges*  
Nancy Carlson, *Michigan State University*  
Candis Cousins, *Wright Institute*  
Leonard Duhl, *University of California, Berkeley*  
Kent Hull, *Michigan State University*  
Tom Joe, *National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago*  
Sharon Lansing, *Management Instruction Resources*  
Martha Ross Reddan, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*  
Jeffrey Rubin, *Rutgers University*  
Sally Shannon, *Washington News Associates*  
Ellen Smith, *Georgetown University*  
Virginia Stern, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*  
Kenneth Warner, *University of Michigan*

## OTA Publishing Staff

John C. Holmes, *Publishing Officer*

John Bergling      Kathie S. Boss      Debra M. Datcher      Joe Henson

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††Until January 1982.