

Policy Number	DME104.009
Policy Effective Date	01/01/2026
Policy End Date	09/14/2026

Speech Generating Devices (SGD)

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Disclaimer

Carefully check state regulations and/or the member contract.

Each benefit plan, summary plan description or contract defines which services are covered, which services are excluded, and which services are subject to dollar caps or other limitations, conditions or exclusions. Members and their providers have the responsibility for consulting the member's benefit plan, summary plan description or contract to determine if there are any exclusions or other benefit limitations applicable to this service or supply. **If there is a discrepancy between a Medical Policy and a member's benefit plan, summary plan description or contract, the benefit plan, summary plan description or contract will govern.**

Legislative Mandates

EXCEPTION: For Illinois only: Illinois Public Act 103-0458 [Insurance Code 215 ILCS 5/356z.61] (HB3809 Impaired Children) states all group or individual fully insured PPO, HMO, POS plans amended, delivered, issued, or renewed on or after January 1, 2025 shall provide coverage for therapy, diagnostic testing, and equipment necessary to increase quality of life for children who have been clinically or genetically diagnosed with any disease, syndrome, or disorder that includes low tone neuromuscular impairment, neurological impairment, or cognitive impairment.

EXCEPTION: For HCSC members residing in the state of Arkansas, § 23-79-130 relating to speech or hearing impairment, requires coverage for the necessary care and treatment of loss or impairment of speech or hearing. The phrase "loss or impairment of speech or hearing" shall include those communicative disorders generally treated by a speech pathologist or audiologist licensed by the Board of Examiners in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and which fall within the scope of his or her area of certification. Coverage shall not apply to hearing instruments or devices. This applies to the following: Fully Insured Group, Student, Small Group, Mid-Market, Large Group, HMO, EPO, PPO, POS. Unless indicated by the group, this mandate or coverage will not apply to ASO groups.

Coverage

A speech generating device (SGD) (E2500, E2502, E2504, E2506, E2508, E2510, E2511) **may be considered medically necessary** when **ALL** the following criteria are met:

1. Prior to delivery of the SGD, the individual has had a formal evaluation of their cognitive and communication abilities by a speech-language pathologist (SLP). The formal written evaluation must include, at a minimum, **ALL** of the following elements:
 - a) Current communication impairment, including the type, severity, language skills, cognitive ability, and anticipated course of the impairment;
 - b) An assessment of whether the individual's daily communication needs could be met using other natural modes of communication (gestural, speech, and/or written communication);
 - c) A description of the functional communication goals expected to be achieved and the treatment options;
 - d) Rationale for selection of a specific device and any accessories;
 - e) Demonstration that the individual possesses a treatment plan that includes a training schedule for the selected device;
 - f) Individual has the cognitive and physical abilities to effectively use the selected device and any accessories to communicate;
 - g) Any request for upgrading from a previously issued SGD must provide information regarding the functional benefit to the individual of the upgrade compared to the original device; AND
2. The individual's medical condition is one resulting in a permanent severe expressive speech impairment; AND
3. The individual's speaking needs cannot be met using natural communication methods (gestural, speech, and/or written communication); AND
4. Other forms of treatment have been considered and ruled out; AND
5. The individual's speech impairment will benefit from the device ordered; AND
6. A copy of the SLP's written evaluation and recommendation must be forwarded to the individual's treating physician prior to ordering the device; AND
7. The SLP performing the individual's evaluation may not be an employee of or have a financial relationship with the supplier of the SGD.

Software that enables a laptop computer, desktop computer or personal digital assistant (PDA) to function as an SGD **may be considered medically necessary** as an SGD, provided the individuals is unable to use standard input devices.

Accessories and upgrades **may be considered medically necessary** if the Coverage criteria are met and documentation supporting the medical necessity is clearly documented in the evaluation by the SLP.

An SGD **is considered not medically necessary** for **ANY** of the following:

- Situations in which any one or more of the SGD coverage criteria listed above is not met; OR
- Laptop computers, desktop computer, PDAs, or other devices that are not dedicated SGDs; OR
- More than one SGD.

Communication aids that are not SGDs **are considered not medically necessary** as they:

- Are not prosthetics for speech,
- Do not replace all or part of a body organ,
- Do not replace all or part of the function of a permanently inoperative, absent, or malfunctioning body part.

Examples of nonmedical, non-covered communication aids include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Picture books,
- Flash cards,
- Braille typewriters,
- Text telephone or telecommunication device for the deaf (TDD),
- Devices that allow the individual to communicate messages to others with writing (e.g., a display screen or printout) rather than synthesized speech, or
- Devices that allow the user to communicate with a computer rather than with another person.

Policy Guidelines

None.

Description

Speech Generating Devices (SGD)

Speech generating devices are defined as durable medical equipment that provides an individual who has a severe speech impairment with the ability to meet his or her functional, speaking needs. Speech generating devices are speech aids consisting of devices or software that generate speech and are used solely by the individual who has a severe speech impairment. The speech is generated using one of the following methods:

- Digitized audible/verbal speech output, using prerecorded messages;
- Synthesized audible/verbal speech output which requires message formulation by spelling and device access by physical contact with the device-direct selection techniques;
- Synthesized audible/verbal speech output which permits multiple methods of message formulation and multiple methods of device access; or
- Software that allows a computer or other electronic device to generate audible/verbal speech. (1)

The following do not meet the definition of SGD:

- Internet or phone services or any modification to a patient's home to allow use of the speech generating device because such services or modifications could be used for non-medical equipment;
- Standard phones or personal computers;
- Specific features of an SGD that are not used by the individual who has a severe speech impairment to meet their functional speaking needs;
- Any computing hardware or software not necessary to allow for generation of audible/verbal speech, email, text, or phone messages, such as hardware or software used to create documents and spreadsheets or play games or music, and any other function a computer can perform that is not directly related to meeting the functional speaking communication needs of the patient, including video communications or conferencing. (2)

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) are licensed health professionals educated at the graduate level in the study of human communication and swallowing disorders in individuals of all ages. An SLP holds a Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) in speech-language pathology from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). (3)

Digitized speech, sometimes referred to as a device with whole message speech output, utilizes words or phrases that have been recorded by an individual other than the SGD user for playback upon command of the SGD user.

Synthesized speech, unlike the pre-recorded messages of digitized speech, is a technology that translates a user's input into device-generated speech. Users of synthesized speech SGDs are not limited to re-recorded messages but rather can independently create messages as their communication needs dictate.

Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) are handheld devices that integrate the functions of a small computer with features such as a cell phone, personal organizer, electronic mail, or pager. Information may be input via a pen-based system using a stylus and handwriting recognition software, keyboard or downloaded from a personal computer using special cables and software.

Speech generating software programs enable a laptop computer, desktop computer, or PDA to function as an SGD. Within this policy, the term SGD also describes these speech generating software programs.

Accessories for SGDs include, but are not limited to, access devices that enable selection of letters, words, or symbols via direct or indirect selection techniques. Examples of access devices include optical head pointers, joysticks, switches, wheelchair integration devices and SGD scanning devices. In addition, replacement accessories such as batteries, battery chargers and AC adapters are also included as accessories.

Mounting systems are devices necessary to place the SGD device, switches, and other access devices within reach of the patient.

Accessories for SGDs (4) include, but are not limited to, access devices that enable selection of letters, words, or symbols via direct or indirect selection techniques. Examples of access devices include, but are not limited to:

- Optical head pointers,
- Joysticks,
- SGD scanning devices,
- Switches,
- Wheelchair integration devices, and
- Replacement accessories, such as batteries, battery chargers, AC adapters, etc.

Rationale

This policy is based on a review of coverage guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) specific to speech generating devices (SGD). (1-2)

Coding

Procedure codes on Medical Policy documents are included **only** as a general reference tool for each policy. **They may not be all-inclusive.**

The presence or absence of procedure, service, supply, or device codes in a Medical Policy document has no relevance for determination of benefit coverage for members or reimbursement for providers. **Only the written coverage position in a Medical Policy should be used for such determinations.**

Benefit coverage determinations based on written Medical Policy coverage positions must include review of the member's benefit contract or Summary Plan Description (SPD) for defined coverage vs. non-coverage, benefit exclusions, and benefit limitations such as dollar or duration caps.

CPT Codes	92609
HCPCS Codes	E1399, E1902, E2500, E2502, E2504, E2506, E2508, E2510, E2511, E2512, E2513, E2599

*Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) ©2024 American Medical Association: Chicago, IL.

References

1. CMS-Local Coverage Determination Speech Generating Devices (L33739) (October 1, 2024, Revision 8). Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Available at <<https://www.cms.gov>> (accessed December 2, 2025).
2. CMS-National Coverage Determination for Speech Generating Devices (50.1) (July 29, 2015, Version 2). Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Available at <<https://www.cms.gov>> (accessed December 2, 2025).
3. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Speech-Language Pathologists. Available at <<https://asha.org>> (accessed December 2, 2025).

4. Rispoli MJ, Franco JH, van der Meer L, et al. The use of speech generating devices in communication interventions for individuals with developmental disabilities: A review of the literature. Dev Neurorehabil. 2010; 13(4):276-293. PMID 20629594

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)

The information contained in this section is for informational purposes only. HCSC makes no representation as to the accuracy of this information. It is not to be used for claims adjudication for HCSC Plans.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) does have a national Medicare coverage position. Coverage may be subject to local carrier discretion.

A national coverage position for Medicare may have been changed since this medical policy document was written. See Medicare's National Coverage at <<https://www.cms.hhs.gov>>.

Policy History/Revision

Date	Description of Change
01/01/2026	Document updated. Minor changes to Coverage made with no change to intent. No new references added; some updated and others removed.
02/15/2025	Reviewed. No changes.
03/15/2024	Document updated with literature review. Coverage unchanged. Reference 2 and 8 added.
03/15/2023	Reviewed. No changes.
05/15/2022	Document updated with literature review. Coverage unchanged. References updated.
03/01/2021	Reviewed. No changes.
07/01/2020	Document updated with literature review. Coverage revised; removed statement "The patient will gain intelligible speech with the device despite the patient's severe communication impairment demonstrated by a one-month trial therapy utilizing the device prior to purchase" and replaced with "The patient's speech impairment will benefit from the device ordered." Added reference 8.
07/15/2018	Reviewed. No changes.
10/15/2017	Document updated with literature review. Coverage unchanged.
04/01/2016	Reviewed. No changes.
08/01/2015	Document updated with literature review. The following was added to coverage: added "permanent" to the following criteria "The patient's medical condition is one resulting in a permanent severe expressive speech".
07/01/2014	Reviewed. No changes.
12/15/2013	Document updated with literature review. Coverage unchanged.
12/01/2007	Revised/updated entire document.
12/01/2005	Codes revised/added/deleted.

09/20/2004	New medical document.
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