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Introduction

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In 1992, the US Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) began an effort to update the conclusions and policy options from its 1982 report, *Technology and Handicapped People*. Our intention was to identify important changes that had occurred in the intervening decade that affect the availability and use of assistive technologies for people with disabilities and to create a document that would inform policymakers about the important issues and options in this area.

To begin the process, we convened a meeting of experts on various aspects of the development, evaluation, diffusion, and financing of assistive technology. The meeting participants noted numerous important changes — new technologies, new laws and regulations, new terminology, new government programs, and changing societal perceptions about disability and the rights of people with disabilities — all of which have affected the availability and use of assistive technologies. They recommended that OTA commission papers to document the changes and analyze their implications for public policy.

This issue of the journal *Technology and Disability* is an outgrowth of the process OTA began. Jan Galvin, the guest editor of the issue, agreed to help us complete the project. She identified

individuals to write each of the papers, worked with them to select the most important issues to focus on, and created a draft document for external review. OTA sent the draft document to numerous experts in the field, asking for their comments and suggestions. By the end of September 1995, when OTA closed, we had received comments from many of these people. Over the next year, Jan and Betsy Tewey incorporated the comments, and the journal offered to publish the papers.

We are very grateful to Jan, to *Technology and Disability* and to all those who participated in the initial meeting, wrote the papers, and provided comments on the draft document. This issue reflects their efforts and contributions. We believe these papers are an important addition to the growing literature in this field. More importantly, we believe that the information and ideas presented in the papers will contribute to the goal we share with everyone who participated in this process — the goal of making available to all people with disabilities the devices and technologies that can help them to function at their maximum capability and enjoy the greatest possible quality of life.

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