

Our summary of The Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT)

Summaries and Article Critiques

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In 2022, the World Health Organization and UNICEF released the *Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT)*, which offered a powerful overview of how assistive technology, (AT) can be accessed and used around the world.

Access to appropriate AT is crucial for enabling education, workforce participation, and independent living, thus ensuring there is quality of life for individuals. This report findings are relevant to all people of Aotearoa

What the Report Found

- **Widespread Need**
More than 2.5 billion people globally need at least one assistive product. This number is expected to grow to 3.5 billion by 2050, due to an aging population and rising rates of chronic illness.
- **Access Gaps**
While around 90% of people in high-income countries have access to the assistive devices they need, this figure drops sharply in low-income countries—sometimes as low as 3%.
- **Key Barriers**
The report highlights high costs, limited product availability, lack of trained staff, and low awareness as major obstacles. These issues prevent many people from getting the equipment they need to live independently and participate fully in society.

Recommendations

The report outlines ten actionable recommendations to improve global AT access:

- 1. Integrate AT into Key Development Sectors**
Ensure AT is part of essential services like health, education, and social welfare.
- 2. Ensure Product Safety and Affordability**
Develop and enforce quality standards to make AT products safe, effective, and affordable.
- 3. Expand and Diversify Workforce**
Increase the number and variety of trained professionals in the AT sector.
- 4. Involve Users and Their Families:** Engage AT users and their families in the development and implementation of AT services.
- 5. Raise Public Awareness:** Combat stigma and increase understanding of AT through public education campaigns.
- 6. Invest in Data and Evidence-Based Policies**
Collect and utilise data to inform AT policies and programs.
- 7. Promote Research and Innovation**
Support research to foster innovation in AT products and services.
- 8. Develop Enabling Environments**
Create policies and infrastructures that support AT access and usage.
- 9. Include AT in Humanitarian Responses**
Ensure AT needs are addressed during emergencies and humanitarian crises.
- 10. Support Through International Cooperation**
Provide technical and financial assistance to countries to improve their AT services.

Why It Matters

Access to the right assistive technology can make a huge difference. It helps people engage in education, join the workforce, and live with more autonomy. The benefits aren't just individual—they ripple out into communities and economies as well.

What Needs to Change

The report lays out ten clear recommendations, from integrating AT into national health and education systems, to increasing public awareness and improving affordability. It

also calls for more involvement from users and families, stronger international cooperation, and investment in innovation and research.

How this may relate to New Zealand in 2024

"In the article by Manship et al. (2023), *The experiences and perceptions of health-care professionals regarding assistive technology training: A systematic review*, they explore the training needs and experiences of healthcare professionals (HCPs) in relation to assistive technology (AT). It highlights the increasing global demand for AT devices to support independent living, especially as populations age and chronic illnesses rise. The study synthesizes data from 62 studies involving 7,846 participants, showing significant gaps in HCPs' access to training, which limits their ability to effectively prescribe and support the use of AT. The review suggests that comprehensive, ongoing training is crucial for HCPs to be confident and competent in using AT to help users live independent, healthy lives.

Key findings include the need for tailored education and ongoing support after training to ensure long-term competence and confidence among HCPs. The study also discusses the perceived barriers to AT training, such as lack of availability and access, and emphasizes the importance of continued research on the effectiveness of AT training programmes.

The findings of this article align closely with the *Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT)* as according to the GReAT report, more than 2.5 billion people globally need at least one assistive product, a number projected to rise to 3.5 billion by 2050. However, the report highlights significant barriers to accessing AT, including high costs, limited availability of products, a shortage of trained professionals, and low awareness, particularly in low-income countries.

Both the systematic review and the GReAT report emphasize the need for a trained workforce in the AT sector to ensure that individuals receive appropriate support and equipment. The GReAT report provides ten actionable recommendations to improve global AT access, such as integrating AT into health, education, and social welfare systems, increasing public awareness, and expanding the AT workforce. These recommendations directly address the gaps identified in the systematic review, particularly the need for trained professionals and tailored training programs.

The overlap between the findings of both documents underscores the importance of addressing training gaps in healthcare professionals to ensure that AT users are

adequately supported. The systematic review advocates for continued research on AT training effectiveness, which is one of the recommendations in the GReAT report to foster innovation and improve the AT sector globally.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, these findings are particularly relevant, as the demand for AT is increasing, and addressing training gaps in the workforce is crucial to improving access and outcomes for individuals who rely on AT for independence and quality of life.

References

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Manship, S., Hatzidimitriadou, E., Moore, J., Stein, M., Towse, D., & Smith, R. (2023). The experiences and perceptions of health-care professionals regarding assistive technology training: A systematic review. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 45(1), 123-146. doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2023.2219294