

Health Care Advice

ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND EQUIPMENT

Wheelchairs – Manual and Power

This item is primarily used for workers who are severely impaired. Workers are considered severely impaired if their disabilities/impairments are:

- permanent and have been rated for either permanent disability (PD) benefits totaling at least 100%, or non-economic loss (NEL) benefits totaling at least 60%, or
- likely to be permanent in the opinion of a WSIB medical consultant, and are likely to meet one of the criteria above (Operational Policy 17-06-02).

General Description

A manual wheelchair is a hand-operated wheelchair.

An electric or power wheelchair is a motorized wheelchair. Power wheelchairs are typically controlled by a joystick or alternative input device.

Guiding Principles

A wheelchair may be appropriate for workers who, as a result of a work-related injury/disease have:

- lost one or both legs, or
- paralysis of the legs.

Relevant Operational Policies

Entitlement to Health Care, 17-01-02

Independent Living Allowance, 17-06-02

Independent Living Devices, 17-06-03

Othopaedic, 17-07-05

Vehicle Modification, 17-06-07

Home Modification, 17-06-08

Considerations

NOTICE: This document is intended to assist WSIB decision-makers in reaching consistent decisions in similar fact situations and to supplement applicable WSIB policies and guidelines as set out in the Operational Policy Manual (OPM). This document is **not a policy** and in the event of a conflict between this document and an OPM policy or guideline, the decision-maker will rely on the latter.

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What is needed	WSIB considers
Information that the worker has difficulty walking due to the work-related injury/disease.	Work-related injury/disease may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• spinal cord injury,• lower extremity amputations,• neurological conditions. <p>Note: This is not an exhaustive list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consult with the treating health professional or WSIB medical consultant if it is unclear whether the need for the wheelchair is due to the work-related injury/disease.
There has been a review of the worker's present equipment, if any.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine if the worker has a mobility device, and whether it has been funded by WSIB.• Clarify with worker why present equipment is not meeting daily needs.• Determine whether a wheelchair has been provided by WSIB in the past, if so, see Repairs and Replacement (in this document).

Mobility Information and Review of Recommendations

If not already on file, mobility information is required to determine if a wheelchair is necessary, appropriate and sufficient for the worker.

The mobility information is provided by a health professional. The information may be collected in a variety of settings, such as the worker's home, a hospital or treating facility.

The mobility information is submitted to the Service Delivery Team for review. The mobility

information will:

- clarify the clinical rationale for the wheelchair, and
- recommend specific features required for the worker's needs.

If mobility information has not been provided, a referral should be made to a health professional by the WSIB Service Delivery Team to obtain the required information.

Mobility information required	WSIB considers
<p>What problems is the worker having with ability to walk for daily living activities?</p> <p>Takes into account the worker's physical abilities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sitting balance, • any safety concerns, • ability to transfer on/off the wheelchair, • estimated walking tolerance, if applicable, • upper body strength and range of motion, • skin integrity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor and/or outdoor mobility must be significantly restricted without use of a wheelchair. • Worker must have sufficient upper body range of motion and strength to propel a manual wheelchair. • Indications for use of a power wheelchair may include poor upper body range of motion and strength.
<p>Why is current equipment not meeting daily needs, and what simpler and more cost-effective alternative devices were considered (e.g., cane, walker, manual wheelchair, power wheelchairs, scooter) and why do they not meet the worker's needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information should specify why present equipment and more cost-effective alternative devices do not meet the worker's needs. • WSIB will consider payment of the most cost-effective mobility device which is clinically necessary and related to the work-related injury/disease.
<p>How often will the wheelchair be used?</p> <p>Where will the wheelchair be used? Indoors, outdoors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If primary wheelchair (manual or power) – typically used for all independent mobility tasks and activities. • If secondary wheelchair (manual or power) – should be used to enhance long distance/outdoor/rough terrain mobility needs. <p>Note: A wheelchair may not be considered a health care device if only used infrequently on certain terrains.</p>
<p>Was the wheelchair tried? Where?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker should have tried the wheelchair (or a similar one) in the environment where it will be used.
<p>Information that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the worker is safe and independent using the wheelchair, • any cognitive/perceptual concerns have been identified, • if the worker is not able to use the wheelchair independently, the amount and type of caregiver assistance required is identified, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The worker must be deemed safe to operate a wheelchair, or • A caregiver must be available to provide needed assistance, or • It is deemed that with further training sessions, the worker will be safe.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of any expected changes to the worker's condition in the long term, and • Discusses if the worker's condition is expected to change, identifies how the wheelchair can be modified to accommodate this (e.g., change in cushion, addition of tilt/recline feature, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify prognosis/long term need for wheelchair with health professional. • Consider rental of wheelchair if condition is temporary and expected to improve. • Ensure wheelchair is still most appropriate device if worker's condition is expected to deteriorate.

Home, Work, and Vehicle Compatibility

Information required	WSIB considers
<p>Is the wheelchair compatible with the home environment? The following information is required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entrance to home (including walkway/ driveway, doorway width, ramp or steps), • doorway widths within the home, • access to bathroom and bedroom, • flooring. <p>Note: This is not an exhaustive list.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair must be able to fit into the worker’s home environment. <p>If home modifications are needed, the Service Delivery Team members should contact the Serious Injury Program for information on how to access preferred supplier.</p>
<p>Is the wheelchair compatible with the workplace or school environment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair must be able to fit in the worker’s workplace or school environment, if applicable. • An assessment of the workplace or school may be required to ensure access.
<p>Is the wheelchair to be transported in a vehicle? The following information is required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether wheelchair can fit in vehicle, • how wheelchair will be lifted in/out of vehicle, • how the worker will transfer in/out of vehicle, and • whether worker will be a driver or a passenger. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle modifications may be recommended to lift wheelchair and/or transfer worker in/out of vehicle. • The worker may require specialized controls for driving. • Evaluation by a driving assessment centre may be recommended to determine the available options for vehicle modifications, as appropriate. • If vehicle modifications are needed, the Service Delivery Team members should contact the preferred supplier for vehicle modifications directly.

If the available information is not sufficient, consult with the health professional who provided the information for clarification.

Considerations for Skin Breakdown

Workers who sit in a wheelchair for long periods of time may be at risk for skin breakdown. This concern should be addressed in the mobility information. Special features on the wheelchair may be recommended if there is

- a history of skin ulcers, or
- a risk of skin breakdown.

Special features on wheelchair	Considerations	WSIB considers
Tilt/recline options	<p>To be considered if worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has, or is at risk for developing, skin breakdown, • requires caregiver to change their position, • is not able to transfer on/off wheelchair independently, • has compromised respiratory function, or • has spasticity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain alone is generally not sufficient rationale for tilt/recline. • Alternative methods of pain management should be considered, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trial of a different cushion, - addition of positioning supports, - medical interventions for pain, - education from a health professional (e.g. on proper positioning, pain management strategies).
Wheelchair pressure-relieving cushions	<p>To be considered if worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has, or is at risk for developing, skin breakdown, • has difficulty changing position when seated, • has pain, or • has difficulty sitting for long periods of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to obtain a pressure-relieving cushion in a timely manner to prevent complications from skin breakdown. <p>Consider repairs of cushion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if vendor is able to offer cushion repair. <p>Consider replacement of cushion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if cushion is near end of life cycle (1-2 yrs), or • there has been significant change in the worker’s medical or functional status that is expected to be a permanent or long-term need.

Repairs and Replacement for Wheelchairs

Repairs may be considered if:

- there is ongoing need for the wheelchair due to the work-related injury/disease.
- they are necessary for the safe and proper use of the wheelchair.
- charge for repair is less than the estimated cost of a replacement.
- there has been no significant change to the worker's medical condition or function.
- wheelchair is generally in good condition, and not expected to need replacement in the near future.

Consider replacement if:

- problems with wheelchair are related to a change in the worker's physical condition.
- wheelchair is "inoperative" and cost to repair exceeds cost to replace wheelchair.
- wheelchair is near end of expected life cycle (e.g., wheelchair is over five years old).

If a replacement is planned, up-to-date mobility information is needed to determine if a wheelchair is still a safe and appropriate device for the worker.

Expected lifespan of wheelchair

A wheelchair can be expected to last at least five years.

Maintenance/Repair

The WSIB pays for maintenance, normal inspection, repair and replacement of independent living devices (that cost over \$250) unless the damage is due to misuse or to not following the warranty or operating instructions. Workers must ensure proper maintenance is carried out.

Health Services

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