

# Health Care Advice

## ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND EQUIPMENT

### Power-Assist Wheels

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

Power-assist wheels are installed on a manual wheelchair. Power-assist uses a combination of programmable software and lightweight motors to give the user a “power boost” whenever the wheel rims are pushed. This allows a manual wheelchair user to propel with less effort and strain.

#### Guiding Principles

- Power-assist wheels are appropriate for workers who have the ability to propel a manual wheelchair (See Health Care Advice, Wheel-

chairs–Manual and Power), but use of manual wheelchair is not meeting essential mobility needs.

There are many potential benefits of power-assist wheels for manual wheelchair users, such as:

- reduced strain on muscles and joints,
- prevention and reduction of repetitive movement syndromes, deformity and skin breakdown,
- energy conservation for tasks of daily living,
- maintenance and improvement of cardiovascular system (instead of using a power wheelchair),
- psychological benefits of using a manual wheelchair instead of a power wheelchair,
- increased participation in activities of daily living.

#### Relevant Operational Policies

*Entitlement to Health Care, 17-01-02*  
*Independent Living Devices, 17-06-03*  
*Orthopaedic, 17-07-05*  
*Vehicle Modification, 17-06-07*  
*Home Modification, 17-06-08*

**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.

#### Considerations

What is needed	WSIB considers
Information that the worker has a work-related injury/disease requiring the use of a wheelchair and has difficulty with propulsion of a manual wheelchair.	Work-related injury/disease may include <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• spinal cord injury,</li><li>• lower extremity amputation,</li><li>• neurological condition.</li></ul> <b>Note:</b> This is not an exhaustive list.
Review of worker's present equipment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine if the worker has a mobility device, and whether it has been funded by WSIB.</li><li>• Clarify with worker why present equipment is not meeting daily needs.</li></ul>

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## Mobility Information and Review of Recommendations

If not already on file, mobility information is required to determine the worker’s need for power-assist wheels.

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 power-assist wheels, 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 does the worker have in propelling a manual wheelchair? Takes into account the worker’s physical abilities, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general tolerance,</li> <li>• any safety concerns,</li> <li>• upper extremity strength for propulsion,</li> <li>• repetitive strain/overuse injury.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor and/or outdoor mobility must be restricted <b>or</b> worker is at risk of further injury without use of power assist wheels.</li> </ul>
<p>Why is the current equipment <b>not</b> meeting daily needs, <b>and</b> what simpler or more cost-effective alternative devices were considered and why do they not meet the worker’s needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information should specify why present equipment and more cost-effective alternative devices do not meet the worker’s needs.</li> <li>• WSIB will consider payment of the most cost-effective mobility device which is clinically necessary and related to the compensable condition.</li> </ul>
<p>Have the power-assist wheels been tried? Where? (e.g., indoor, outdoor, rugged terrain, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worker should have tried the power-assist wheels (or similar ones) to ensure that they are appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p>Information that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the worker is safe and independent using the manual wheelchair with power assist wheels,</li> <li>• any cognitive/perceptual concerns have been identified, where applicable,</li> <li>• if the worker is not able to use the power-assist wheels independently, the amount and type of caregiver assistance required is identified,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The worker must be deemed safe to operate a manual wheelchair with power-assist wheels, <b>or</b></li> <li>• A caregiver must be available to provide needed assistance, <b>or</b></li> <li>• It is deemed that with further training sessions, the worker will be safe.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of any expected changes to the worker’s condition in the long term, and/or</li> <li>• Discusses if the worker’s condition is expected to deteriorate, identifies the pros and cons of power-assist wheels vs. power wheelchair/scooter.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify prognosis/long term need for power-assist wheels with health professional.</li> <li>• Consider rental of power-assist wheels if condition is temporary and expected to improve.</li> <li>• Ensure power-assist wheels are still appropriate, and can be adjusted for long term needs, <b>if</b> worker’s condition is expected to deteriorate.</li> </ul> <p><b>Example:</b> Adjustability of sensitivity of force required to propel wheelchair.</p>
<p>Are the power-assist wheels compatible with the worker’s present manual wheelchair?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power-assist wheels may or may not fit onto the worker’s present wheelchair.</li> <li>• Clarify with the health professional if a new manual wheelchair is also being recommended (if so, refer to Health Care Advice, Wheelchair – Manual and Power).</li> </ul>

## Home, Work and Vehicle Compatibility

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

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

### 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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