

A man with short brown hair, wearing a grey t-shirt and blue jeans, is sitting in a black wheelchair. He is positioned in front of a weathered, blue-painted wooden door. The door has peeling paint and a small metal handle. The man is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a light blue wall. The overall scene is outdoors, with a paved ground in front of the door.

A User's Guide to Wheelchairs

WELCOME

Welcome to your one-stop guide to wheelchairs! In today's market consumers have a lot of choice when it comes to selecting a wheelchair – and while this is good, it can also be overwhelming. Whether you have been using a wheelchair for a while or are in the market for the first time, it's a good idea to do some research before visiting a store to get a sense of what you're in for.

There are numerous things to consider when selecting a wheelchair. First and foremost is the appropriateness, the usability, the fit, the comfort and the safeness of the wheelchair for the wheelchair user. It's also important to think about what type of wheelchair will suit your lifestyle best to ensure it can support you in everything you want to do; whether that's work, travel, or simply getting from A to B. Some people may require more than one chair, for example their “everyday” chair and a chair specifically designed for their sport of choice.

Buying a wheelchair can also be a big investment. There are constantly improving technologies designed to improve comfort and usability, so make sure you take all the time you need to do your research and speak to qualified experts to make sure you get the right wheelchair for your needs.

The Blue Badge Insurance User's Guide to Wheelchairs will inform you on everything you need to know about choosing, buying and using your wheelchair. This guide is designed to answer your questions, but if you need information that you still can't find, just flick to the back of the book for a handy list of organisations who will be happy to tell you more.



Choosing Your Wheelchair

How To Choose A Wheelchair

Get the Right Advice

Broadly speaking, there are two types of wheelchairs: self-propel and power (or electric) wheelchairs. There are also a number of power assist add-on devices which can be fitted to manual wheelchairs. For most people their disability or medical condition will influence what type of wheelchair and power assist devices they need and it's important that you discuss your options and preferences with an experienced clinician and/or therapist (most commonly an Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist or Doctor). If your wheelchair is being funded by a government funding scheme then this will be a requirement. They will help you decide what type of wheelchair is best for you and can also liaise with your wheelchair supplier to make sure that you get the very best product for your needs.

As well as the clinician/therapists, many wheelchair suppliers have years of experience and can be a fantastic resource for trials and information on all the options. Try to find a local dealer that you feel comfortable with. A good relationship with a dealer will make ongoing maintenance and support much easier.

Below are some of the things that will be looked at during the assessment process.

Mobility Requirements

Your mobility requirements are a key factor when deciding what type of wheelchair is best for you because it's important to ensure that you will be able to easily and comfortably use your wheelchair in a variety of everyday situations including transferring into seats, beds and toilets. Your mobility will also affect whether a manual, manual with power assist, or powered wheelchair is suitable for you.

Your Size

It's important that your wheelchair fits you well. A well fitted wheelchair is easier to push, helps maintain good posture, is safer and will minimise risk of pressure related injury and shoulder pain. Look out for the weight limit of the wheelchair to ensure it is appropriate for you.

“Growable” Chairs For Children

Size is critically important for kids, especially as they go through growth periods. Depending on the medical condition, a well fitted wheelchair can help minimise skeletal deformation and maximise function. There are great options for “growable” chairs to facilitate this growth.

Lifestyle

Wheelchairs are intended to increase your mobility and provide independence so it's important to consider your lifestyle and general circumstances when making your choice. For example, if you intend to travel a lot you should consider a wheelchair that can be easily transported which may influence the materials, batteries and/or accessories you select for your wheelchair.



Image: Magic Mobility

Environment

When choosing the most appropriate wheelchair, accessories, and components; the environment is an important part of the equation. A proper assessment will determine how appropriate a wheelchair is within the home, the work environment, the wheelchair users/carers vehicle, the local area etc.

Carers

If you rely on a carer to help you assemble, transport, store or maintain your wheelchair, it's important that they understand how it works, and that they can manage activities such as lifting it in and out of the car. Take them with you when choosing your wheelchair and encourage them to ask plenty of questions. Carers are often in a position to notice changes in your condition before you doctor does, so be sure to listen to their concerns.

Pressure Care

A significant number of wheelchair users are at high risk of pressure injury. Pressure injury can result in huge sores that may take many months to heal, with long periods of "bed rest" required. Some even result in surgery. As well as pressure care, posture needs to be taken into consideration. The seating components, such as cushion, backrest, headrest etc. are important parts of the wheelchair. Qualified clinicians/therapists will help you take all these factors into consideration when choosing your wheelchair.

The Future

Wheelchairs can last many years, and you want to make sure that you get the most out of your purchase. To do that, it's important to consider your needs both today and in the future. Before purchasing your wheelchair, think about how your medical condition and lifestyle might change over the next five years. Future changes to consider include:

- Physical needs can change over time and this will impact your wheelchair components and accessories including your seating, head rests, foot plates, backrest and other accessories. Speak to your doctor, therapist and wheelchair supplier to ensure these changes are taken into consideration.
- Changes in your height and weight.
- Lifestyle changes such as starting a family, getting a new job, retiring or learning to drive.
- Whether you want to take your wheelchair with you on holiday.

Your Doctor can refer you to a qualified Occupational Therapist. However, if you'd would like more information on Occupational Therapists visit Occupational Therapy Australia: www.otaus.com.au

Try Before You Buy

It's important to make sure that you are comfortable with your wheelchair choice for the long-term. Because most wheelchairs are customised for the user's individual needs it may not always be possible to try the exact wheelchair that you intend to buy, but you can usually trial a similar model with some of the customisations you intend to purchase. If you are working with a clinician/therapist they will help coordinate this. If you are researching for yourself make sure you ask your supplier if this is something they can provide.

You should also consider taking a friend or family member with you so they can help you with your decision. Remember to ask lots of questions and never feel rushed into making a decision.

Wheelchair Components And Accessories

Most wheelchairs are customised to support the needs of the individual user. This ensures the final product is not only suitable for your unique needs and lifestyle, but it also helps maximise comfort so that you can use your wheelchair for years to come. As always, it's best to seek the advice of a professional when it comes to selecting your accessories, so make sure you speak with your doctor, occupational therapist and/or qualified wheelchair supplier before you purchase your components and accessories.

Headrests

Headrests are necessary if your wheelchair has a tilt function or you require support to hold your head upright. There are a wide range of headrests available in today's market offering different shapes, sizes and covers to suit almost every need. Make sure you speak to your clinician/therapist and/or wheelchair supplier to help you select the best headrest option for you.



Image: Magic Mobility

Seating

Selecting the right seating option is critical for all custom wheelchair users as it provides the necessary postural support, positioning and pressure management while ensuring the wheelchair is safe, stable and easy to use. Seating is a very personal decision because it will depend on your height, weight, mobility restrictions and lifestyle so make sure you test a few options and voice any concerns you have.

Some of the things you should consider when selecting your preferred seating option include:

- Design and level of pressure care protection.
- Expected lifespan and maintenance of the cushion.
- Whether you need special inserts or positioning supports for additional postural support and comfort.
- Type of cover you would like for your cushion.
- The back support, lateral supports and secondary supports such as lap belts and shoulder harnesses. etc.

Legrests and Footplates

It's important to select the right legrests and footplates. Ensuring they are adjusted to the correct height will help stability, weight distribution and minimise pressure at the pelvis. Depending on the type of wheelchair you have, footplates can be mounted directly to your wheelchair or suspended to allow you to adjust the positioning. The way you transfer in and out of the wheelchair will also impact on type of legrests you choose. There are also a range of foot and leg accessories like gel and sheepskin covers, leg rests and other accessories to maximise comfort.



Image: Magic Mobility

Armrests

Armrests are another key element when it comes to choosing components for your wheelchair. If armrests are required, ensure they are set at the correct height, and consider whether you need any padding, contouring or wraps to support your wrists and elbows.

Input Devices – Joysticks

Most powered wheelchairs are operated by joystick. In most cases, these are positioned at the end of the armrest for the user's dominant hand. There is a wide variety of shapes and designs to meet the needs of people with limited upper limb and hand function. There are also options for mounting the joysticks in positions that are more accessible, for example centre mounted.

Alternate Power Wheelchair Controls

There are several alternative control options available if you prefer to control your wheelchair using other parts of your body. These include:

Voice Controls

This technology is similar to those used by other smart devices which allow you to control your device, in this case your wheelchair, using verbal commands.

Chin Controls

These are very similar to hand-controlled joysticks in that chin control are joysticks controlled using the chin.

Head Array

These are usually placed inside a headrest that is attached to your wheelchair, allowing you to control your wheelchair using your head movements.

Mouth Controls

These controls are essentially mouthpieces that are affixed to your mouth enabling you to control your wheelchair using either tongue movements or your breath (inhalation and exhalation).

Eye Gaze

An emerging technology that allows the wheelchair to be controlled via a computer using the movement of the wheelchair user's eyes.

Powering a Manual Wheelchair

One of the most sought-after innovations for manual wheelchairs are power assist devices. These technologies help convert a manual wheelchair into a powered wheelchair, allowing the user to conserve energy, minimise the risk of upper body injury, manage inclines/declines and in some cases, go where they may not be able to go on their manual wheelchair.

There are numerous options available for manual wheelchair users who wish to power their manual wheelchair, including power assist devices, handbike attachments and power assist wheels.



Powering a Manual Wheelchair

by Malcolm Turnbull

Read more about powering your manual wheelchair, including the pros and cons of different accessories, on the Blue Badge Insurance blog.

[READ NOW](#)



Useful Accessories

There are also a number of other accessories available to help make your life a little easier. These include:

Device Holders

These are ideal for securely holding and transporting speech devices, smart phones, tablets, laptops and cameras. These can typically be customised to suit your chosen device/s and accommodate your physical requirements.

Suspension Devices

While most wheelchairs have built-in suspension devices to help manage pain and discomfort while navigating rough terrain, there are stand-alone devices available if you feel you need more help in this area.

Equipment Holders

It's a good idea to tell your wheelchair supplier if you need to carry a cane, walking frame, oxygen tank or any other accessories with you so they can advise you on the best options for safely transporting these items on your wheelchair.

Storage

There are a number of different storage options available to wheelchair users. These range from bags and backpacks that are attached to your seat through to specialised storage boxes if you require a sturdier option.

Ramps

While ramps aren't designed to be fixed to your wheelchair like the other accessories mentioned above, many wheelchair users opt to purchase a portable ramp so they are not limited by steps when they are out and about. Most portable ramps can be folded so they can be easily carried and transported. Ask your wheelchair supplier if you are interested in a portable ramp.

Add On Front Wheel, Such As The Freewheel™

These connects to a manual wheelchairs to help travelling over rough terrain.

“Bush And Beach” Wheels

These are attached to the rear of the wheelchair. Most manual wheelchairs have quick release rear wheels, having a set of bush and beach wheels can be useful for use in rough terrain.

Paediatric Wheelchairs

When choosing a paediatric wheelchair, it's important to think of a few additional factors to ensure that the child can safely enjoy an active and independent lifestyle. It's best to consult with your clinician/therapist to get their advice on what type of paediatric wheelchair you should consider. Below are some of the things to think about when making your choice.

Growth

Kids grow, so it's important to find a wheelchair with frames and accessories that can support the child's physical growth and mobility/skill changes over time. Kids should have an appropriately sized wheelchair at all times, never buy a chair that is too big because they will eventually grow into it. This can have serious negative health and social repercussions.

Transport

Many of the paediatric wheelchairs have the option of tie downs so that the child can be transported in their wheelchair. This often means kids can be included in school excursions, transport to and from school, or in a specially modified family vehicle. Wheelchairs with tie downs need to have been tested and passed the relevant ISO/Australian/NZ standards. A headrest is also required for this purpose. If this is something that is important to you, make sure you mention it to your clinician/therapist and/or wheelchair supplier so they can find a model with transport capability.



Image: Permobil

Propelling Versus Attendant Propel Function

The child's ability will dictate how well they can propel their wheelchair. In some cases it may be necessary for an attendant to help push and guide the wheelchair so make sure the wheelchair you select offers both of these functions if it's important for you. Remember, the more the child can mobilise independently the more opportunity they will have for exploration and socialising.

Tilt Function

You may want to consider a wheelchair with a tilt function to assist with feeding, digestion, respiratory function or visual orientation and support the child's positioning needs and comfort.

RECREATIONAL WHEELCHAIRS

In today's market, there are numerous specialised wheelchairs and other assistive technologies available for use in a wide range of sports and recreational activities. From traditional sports like basketball, rugby, golfing and cycling through to adventure sports like mountain biking, surfing and skiing – the options are endless!

If you would like to start participating in wheelchair sports, it's a good idea to first speak with your clinician/therapist to get the all clear for playing your chosen sport. After that, all you need to do is a bit of research to find a local club where you can start playing.

Wheelchair Sports

Most wheelchair sports have their own requirements on the type of wheelchair you must use. This normally relates to the weight, size, speed, manoeuvrability and wheel specifications. It's a good idea to borrow or hire a wheelchair specifically designed for your sport of choice before purchasing one to get a sense of what you like before you buy. Most sport clubs can help point you in the right direction on where to hire and buy a suitable wheelchair for your sport.



If you're interested in exploring disability sports, **Disability Sports Australia** is a great place to start.

[CLICK HERE](#)



All-Terrain Wheelchairs

If you enjoy the outdoors you may want to consider purchasing an all-terrain or off-road wheelchair for when you venture into the wild!

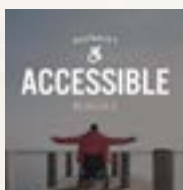
All-terrain wheelchairs are equipped to handle traversing rough terrain including rocks, snow sand and steep slopes while minimising seat movement for a comfortable ride in the most extreme environments. This makes them a great option for people who enjoy camping, bushwalking, fishing, shooting and other similar activities. They typically feature sturdier frames and larger wheels that stay in contact with the ground on most surfaces and specialised batteries. They also include seating transfer systems to facilitate transferring from a wheelchair.

Beach Wheelchairs

Australia has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, and they are becoming increasingly accessible with the availability of beach wheelchairs and beach mats. Most beach wheelchairs available for use at public beaches are attendant push, and can be pushed on both dry and wet sand and into shallow waters. They are a great way to enjoy everything the beach has to offer if you are happy to be pushed. If you're planning on going to a certain beach, do a quick online search before you go to see if they offer beach wheelchairs for hire and make sure you secure yours as far as possible in advance because they book out quickly.

There are also a range of beach mats available for anyone who would prefer to use their own wheelchair to access the beach. These mats can be safely used by most wheelchairs and allow you to turn the wheelchair around without getting stuck in the sand.

While more and more beaches across the country are beginning to offer beach wheelchairs and mats for hire, regular beach goers can also purchase them from reputable wheelchair suppliers. There are great options for self propel beach wheelchairs available.



Find out more about
accessible beaches near you
at Accessible Beaches Australia.

[CLICK HERE](#)

Buying A Wheelchair

CHOOSING A SUPPLIER

Do a quick online search and you'll find lots of places to buy wheelchairs. These range from specialist suppliers with a wide range and deep knowledge of the industry, to pharmacists who might have one or two models, and individuals selling their second-hand wheelchair. Like most things, the more complex the needs the more expertise the supplier needs to have. You'll want to choose a reputable supplier to help you choose the best product for you. Below are some of the things to look out for when choosing a reliable wheelchair supplier.



Test Driving

The supplier should work in conjunction with your clinician/therapist to ensure you have ample opportunity to know what options are available for you, and to facilitate trials to help your decision-making process. In many cases they'll do onsite trials so you can try them out in the area/s that you'll use your wheelchair most.



Consulting

Reputable suppliers are happy to consult with your clinician/therapist. They will also welcome, and prefer, your clinician/therapist be present when you test drive or choose your wheelchair.



Training

Once you've chosen your wheelchair, the supplier should provide you comprehensive training on how to use it, store and maintain it. This should all be included at no extra charge.



After Sales Service

Good suppliers provide after sales service to ensure you are happy with your purchase and maintain your wheelchair in top condition. This will include a warranty and servicing to help keep you moving.



Warranty

All purchases made in Australia are covered by warranty under the Fair Trade Act. Reputable suppliers will provide details of warranty on their products, even if they are second hand. The warranty on frames will often be five years whereas other components such as upholstery and wheels will often be shorter (check your warranty documents for the exact details). You'll also want to make sure the warranty covers parts, repairs and labour and always check where the location of the nearest warranty centre is. If you're buying your wheelchair from interstate or overseas, make sure that your warranty includes the cost of shipping your wheelchair back for repairs as this can sometimes cost more than the repairs themselves.



Compliance

There are compliance regulations for powered and manual wheelchairs in Australia. For powered wheelchairs these include being speed limited to 10 km per hour and safety requirements for brakes, batteries and chargers. Both powered and manual wheelchairs being purchased by government funding require they have passed Australian Standards testing. These regulations are designed to keep you and the people around you safe when you use your wheelchair. It may be illegal to use your wheelchair in Australia if it isn't compliant. Check with your dealer to ensure your equipment is fully compliant with Australian law.



Do Your Research

There are many makes and models of wheelchairs available in today's market. Make sure that the brand you use offers a manufacturer's warranty and that spare parts are easily available. If your wheelchair breaks down, you don't want to have to wait months for spare parts, or find out that your manufacturer has closed down and parts are no longer available. Choosing better-known brands will help to ensure that you have the support you need if something goes wrong.

Buying A Second-Hand Wheelchair

There are a wide range of second-hand wheelchairs available on the market, providing a cost-effective alternative to new models. Vendors range from mainstream mobility equipment dealers who sell refurbished models, to individuals selling a wheelchair they no longer need. Below are some important things to consider when buying a second-hand wheelchair to make sure you're getting value for money:

History

Try and find out as much as you can about the history of your wheelchair. Has it been serviced regularly? Has it been involved in accidents and if so, what was the extent of the damage? How often was it driven? Take the time to ask these questions to ensure you are satisfied with the condition of the wheelchair before buying it.

Test Drive

Take the time to test drive the wheelchair. Consult your doctor or occupational therapist to make sure you choose a suitable model, just as you would if you were buying a new one. Take the time to consider your options and don't let anyone rush you into a decision.

Research

While online, check what year your model of wheelchair was made. It can sometimes be hard to get parts for older models. Contact your local wheelchair repairer and ask if they have access to parts for the specific make and model and whether they have experience repairing them.

Parts

Not all parts on a wheelchair wear evenly. Batteries, tyres and chargers need to be regularly replaced. Ask about the age of these items and whether they have been recently replaced or refurbished. Buying new batteries, tyres and a charger will quickly mount up to hundreds of dollars, making your second-hand wheelchair less of a bargain. Make sure parts are still available for the wheelchair.

Documents

Second-hand wheelchairs often don't come with original documents such as the warranty and owner's manual. These can contain important information so take the time to look up the make and model online as you will often find the manual is available to download for free. It is also recommended that you select a model where manufacturer has an office in Australia so you can buy spare parts when your wheelchair needs repairs.

Warranty

Try and get a warranty. Of course, this will not be possible if you are buying from a private seller, but many mobility equipment suppliers will provide a warranty for refurbished wheelchairs. Make sure your warranty includes both parts and labour and is for at least six months.

Buying Wheelchairs From Overseas

There are also lots of wheelchairs available online from overseas. While these can seem like good value, there are often hidden costs involved. Below are some of the things that you need to look out for when purchasing equipment from overseas.

The first and most important thing is that an online supplier based overseas cannot provide equipment for trial or all the support required in the lead up to deciding what wheelchair is appropriate for you.

While overseas sellers will offer warranties, they are not covered under the Australian Fair Trade Act which gives extensive protection to consumers. Warranty claims can be difficult to action if you buy a product in another country. In addition the conditions of the warranty will often require the product be sent back at the expense of the purchaser.

Many manufacturers do not allow dealers/online stores to sell outside set boundaries due to problems encountered with inappropriate equipment being provided and warranty issues. Find out whether your wheelchair manufacturer has given approval for product to be sold internationally, has offices in Australia, and whether they cover repairs made here.

Make sure that the wheelchair is compliant with Australian Standards. This includes being speed limited to 10km per hour for power wheelchairs, and safety requirements for brakes, batteries and chargers. If your wheelchair doesn't conform to ANZ Standards it may be illegal to use it in Australia, and it may even be a fire hazard.

Wheelchairs being sent from overseas will often arrive dismantled. This means that you'll have to assemble it when it arrives. Assembling a wheelchair can be particularly challenging for someone with a mobility impairment, or who doesn't have the necessary technical expertise.

Shipping a wheelchair from overseas can be both expensive and time consuming. Take the cost of shipping into account and check how long it is likely to take to arrive. A wheelchair sent by cargo ship could be in transit and/or customs for months.

It is advisable to ask your local wheelchair supplier/repairer if they are familiar with the make and model of an overseas sourced wheelchair before buying one to see if they can access spare parts should you need it down the track. Otherwise you may face long delays getting repairs, or even have to pay to have your wheelchair shipped overseas for maintenance.

Check the electrical outlets and wattage that your wheelchair uses. Some countries use outlets and wattages that differ from those in Australia, meaning that you won't be able to charge your wheelchair safely. It may be possible to convert wheelchairs and/or chargers for use in Australia, but the cost of this conversion should be factored into the cost of your wheelchair.

Funding

There are various funding organisations that may be able to contribute to the costs of your wheelchair. Each of these organisations have their own qualification criteria so it's best that you contact them directly to find out if you meet their criteria.

Third Party Insurance Schemes, the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS)

Pays for treatment, rehabilitation and care for people who've been severely injured in a motor accident. Includes Icare (NSW), TAC (VIC), NIISSQ (QLD).

Independent Living Centre, WA

The Independent Living Centre manages two grant programs for individuals with disabilities, including funding for wheelchairs and other mobility devices including wheelchair vehicles conversions.

State based funding bodies

Such as SWEP (Vic), Enable (NSW), MASS (Qld), DES (SA and Vic), TasEquip (Tas), CAEP (WA), DEO (NT). These funding bodies provide subsidies towards the cost of mobility equipment help improve independence in your home, assist in community participation and support families and carers in their role.

Workcover NSW

Assist with work injury related equipment and vehicle modification funding.

Work Safe VIC

Assist with work injury related equipment and vehicle modifications.

Charities such as Variety/Rotary



Image: Invacare

NDIS

The NDIS is designed to help Australians under the age of 65 with permanent disabilities. Since its introduction in 2016, the program has assisted thousands of people with the objective of helping “you reach your goals and aspirations, and take part in activities to increase your social and economic participation”. There are many NDIS participant’s who have funded their wheelchair through their NDIS plan. Below are a few things that may prove helpful when applying to get your wheelchair funded.



- 1 Wheelchairs are funded under the Assistive Technology section of NDIS plans.
- 2 In order to fund any assistive technology, the NDIA must first accept that “the item is necessary and reasonable, and will assist the participant to pursue their goals, objectives and aspirations”. When preparing for your NDIS planning meeting make sure you are clear on your goals in relation to work/social participation/independence and how your wheelchair will help you meet those goals. Also consider whether features of your wheelchair, such as tilt and recline on a power chair, will help minimise the number of hours you would require a carer/support.
- 3 The NDIA requires proof that you need your wheelchair as a direct result of your disability. When applying for funding for Assistive Technology you will require an assessment from a qualified Occupational Therapist (OT) or Physiotherapist. As well as the assessment they will coordinate trials, quotes and the necessary reports for the NDIA funding application. Remember that you, the NDIS participant, have control and choice so be sure to express and concerns you may have during the process.
- 4 In certain cases, the NDIA also fund the cost of your OT or any other expert who may be needed to help you select and use your wheelchair. If you are planning on a new piece of Assistive Technology such as a wheelchair be sure to build the cost of this into your plan. The costs for these assessments can be thousands of dollars so it is critical they are included in your plan.
- 5 The NDIA may question or reject funding certain components of your wheelchair. This is typically because they consider them to be unnecessary and/or not reasonable. It’s important to remember that while the NDIS is, in general, more generous than the previous funding schemes, they have an obligation to ensure their funding is being used responsibly. However, if you disagree with their assessment there is an appeal process, but it can take several months to arrive at an outcome. This is why it’s important that you ensure your original application for funding clearly sets out why your wheelchair and all components are required, how the equipment links to your goals, and any cost savings that can be offset by the equipment you are seeking funding for (for example, fewer hours of care).
- 6 The NDIA will also look into the cost of your equipment to ensure it represents value for money. This means they will consider the cost of alternative equipment, as well as the costs of alternative supports which may “provide a similar level of independence and function”.
- 7 While the NDIA will be funding your wheelchair, there’s a good chance that your state funding body (e.g. Enable, SWEP, MASS) will be managing the process on their behalf.
- 8 There are a lot of NDIS participants seeking funding for their assistive technology, so expect delays.
- 9 Ask for realistic delivery times from your supplier.
- 10 If your wheelchair is funded, the NDIA will also likely fund any associated costs that are seen to be reasonable and necessary, including the delivery of the equipment, any costs associated with setting up or configuring the equipment, as well as repairs and maintenance costs.

Find out more about
seeking funding for
Assistive Technology here.

CLICK HERE

Using Your Wheelchair

Practice

The majority of wheelchair accidents happen within the first few months of buying one. This is why it's important that you continue to take your time to get to know your new wheelchair for several weeks after buying it. Try travelling on flat ground and in quiet areas before tackling rough terrain or busy crowds. If you, your family or your doctor feels you need a bit of extra help, an occupational therapist can provide extra training, either when you buy a new wheelchair or if your functionality changes over time.

Road Rules

Each state and territory has its own rules and regulations regarding powered mobility devices, however there are some basic rules which apply right across the country. These include:

- 1 Powered wheelchairs should be speed limited to 10 km per hour on level ground.
- 2 People using wheelchairs are classified as pedestrians and must follow the same road rules as other pedestrians.
- 3 Wheelchairs must not be driven on the road if there is a footpath or nature strip available.
- 4 It's illegal to drive a wheelchair when under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- 5 Wheelchairs do not require registration unless you live in Queensland.

Click on your state or territory to familiarise yourself about the regulations you need to be aware of



Image: Permobil

Safety

Once you've purchased your wheelchair, it's important to make sure you operate it safely and responsibly. Wheelchair accidents are rare, but when they happen they can cause serious injury to the wheelchair user or the people around them. Fortunately, there are lots of things you can do to make using your wheelchair a safe and enjoyable way to get mobile. Below are a few tips to remember.

Stay Visible

It is highly recommended to install a safety flag, reflective strips or lights on your wheelchair. This is especially important if you regularly need to cross roads, move between parked cars or travel at night.

Take Care Crossing Driveways

Remember that on your wheelchair, you're at a height disadvantage compared to other pedestrians and drivers may not see you easily. Safety equipment like lights and flags help, but it's still important to pay close attention to what's going on around you.

Stick to Footpaths

Don't drive on the road unless there is no other option. Be sure to watch for vehicles entering or exiting driveways and for people coming out of shopfronts.

Don't Carry Too Many Parcels

Loading yourself down with too many heavy items not only puts added stress on your wheelchair, it can also cause balance issues, potentially making it tip over. If you plan to regularly carry your shopping, bags or other equipment take this weight into consideration when you choose your wheelchair and ask your supplier to install bags or racks so you can store your items safely.

Don't Speed Through Crowds

In Australia wheelchairs are speed-limited to 10 km per hour, but sometimes people walk much slower than that. To avoid accidents, be sure to match your speed to the people around you, especially when indoors or in crowded areas.

Service Your Wheelchair Regularly

This will keep your wheelchair in top condition and decrease the chance that it will break down unexpectedly or become unsafe.

Know What to do in Case of Breakdown

Have a plan for what to do if your wheelchair suddenly breaks down. Join a roadside assistance program and keep their phone number in your mobile phone. Carry spare tube for your tyres (if appropriate) and always keep your batteries well charged.

Know Your Own Limits

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when staying safe on your wheelchair is to always know the limits of your skills and your wheelchair. If you have trouble with your vision, limit going out at night or in the rain, unless accompanied by someone who can guide you if you run into trouble. Don't use it if you're tired or if your medication has made you drowsy and never drive when affected by drugs or alcohol. Don't try to cross terrains or carry loads that your wheelchair isn't designed to handle and try not to let your batteries run all the way down. A little bit of common sense can go a long way in keeping you and those around you safe.

Maintenance

Regular maintenance will make sure that your wheelchair stays in top condition. In most cases, your wheelchair supplier can provide a service program and be able to carry out the servicing. You should service your wheelchair every six months if you use it every day. It's also worthwhile getting your wheelchair serviced before taking it on holidays or long trips. Servicing should include:

- 1 Checking, and if necessary repairing or replacing batteries and battery chargers.
- 2 Making sure brakes and steering are safe and well-maintained.
- 3 Monitoring and, if necessary, replacing tyres and tubes.
- 4 Checking and maintaining wheel bearings, screws, bolts, fuses and any moving parts.
- 5 Monitoring any concerns you have or changes that you've noticed.
- 6 Looking out for and repairing any damage or wear and tear. A regular service will help to spot any issues before they become major problems.

Repairs

No matter how well you maintain your wheelchair, there will be times when it needs to be repaired due to wear and tear or accidents. All repairs should be conducted by a qualified technician who has experience working with wheelchair and access to spare parts from your wheelchair manufacturer. This will ensure your safety and make sure that repairs are suitable and long lasting. Many suppliers service and repair the wheelchairs that they sell.



Image: Permobil

Tips to Keep Your Wheelchair in Top Condition

Read your manual

This sounds obvious, but your wheelchair's instruction manual will contain lots of tips on caring for your wheelchair.

Keep your wheelchair clean and dry

Store it under cover and if possible, wipe it down regularly with a cloth to avoid dust from getting into moving parts.

Keep your battery well charged and never let it run down completely

Remember that your battery strength can fade if your wheelchair is left unused for a long period of time, especially in cold weather, so be sure to recharge it regularly or purchase a smart charger which will regularly top up your batteries if left plugged in.

Monitor your tyres

Check for tread wear and keep pneumatic tyres well inflated.

Speak up

If you notice any problems or changes, tell your repairer straight away.



Do the Big Insurers
know how to protect
your wheelchair?

Blue Badge Do

Comprehensive cover for
your wheelchair

We know how important your wheelchair is to your everyday life, and that being without it for any length of time doesn't bear thinking about. This is why we think you will love our **Comprehensive Wheelchair Insurance** policy as it offers specialised benefits at a competitive price to keep you moving.



Call **1300 304 802** or visit
BlueBadgeInsurance.com.au

Blue Badge Insurance Australia Pty Ltd (ABN 18 620 594 765) is an Authorised Representative (A.R. No. 1275642) of the Insurer Pacific International Insurance Pty Ltd (ABN 83 169 311 193) AFS Licence No. 379465.

Travelling With Wheelchairs

With a little bit of preparation, you can also take your wheelchair when you travel, giving you extra mobility wherever you want to go. The most important thing to remember when travelling with a wheelchair is to always think ahead and check the accessibility before you set out. This is especially important when travelling with an airline or cruise ships as they all have their own policies.

If you're planning a longer trip, plan for emergencies before you go. Check whether your roadside assistance plan covers the area you're travelling to. If not, find the nearest wheelchair shop to your accommodation and contact them to see if they have technicians who can help you if you have a breakdown. Carry spare batteries and inner tubes (if appropriate) with you. It's also a great idea to insure your wheelchair before you travel, and if you have a pre-existing policy, make sure it covers you while you are overseas.

It's also important to consider the type of wheelchair you use while travelling. While some airlines, cruise ships and train services and hotels provide accessible options for full-size scooters and electric wheelchairs, some providers may not be able to accommodate certain equipment so always call your provider to make sure they can handle your wheelchair before you finalise your booking.



Image: Permobil

Travel Tips

Plan ahead – Make sure the areas you are going to are accessible. This includes transport providers, hotels, restaurants and activities.

Make sure your wheelchair is suited to the area you are going.

Find your nearest wheelchair supplier and keep their details handy in case of emergency.

Carry spare batteries, tires and tubes in case you need them.

If your wheelchair is damaged during transit (e.g. by luggage handlers) report it to the carrier (airline, cruiseship etc.) right away. Most carriers cover any damage caused by their staff, but you must report it immediately.

Get the right insurance cover to ensure you and your wheelchair are protected during your travels.

Our Favourite Disability Travel Sites



Have Wheelchair Will Travel

Have Wheelchair Will Travel is a growing online community offering a wealth of travel information, tips and resources for people with disabilities and their families and friends.

With a thriving social media following, Have Wheelchair Will Travel encourages people to ask any travel and accessibility-related questions, and to offer their own information and experiences in return.

The website offers a wealth of information including:

- Preparing for your trip
- Accommodation and recreation tips and information
- Travel, shopping and money saving tips
- Disability information on various airlines
- Travel insurance

www.havewheelchairwilltravel.net

[Follow on Facebook](#)



WHEELEASY

People with mobility impairments are often forced to stay in because of a lack of quality access information. The impact is not just them alone, but also on their friends and family, stopping everyone from being able to go out and enjoy life together.

Thankfully, there is now a place where people can go to get the quality accessibility information they need to plan their trips and leisure activities. WheelEasy works like Tripadvisor but includes important information about the accessibility of various venues around Australia. It's the ultimate one-stop-shop for all your accessibility information.

WheelEasy has been designed for mobiles so you can easily see what's near you. It grows by crowdsourcing information, asking everyone to share what they know about access, creating a community of people who share the same needs.

Having launched in in 2018, WheelEasy has 10 Hotspots with ratings for over 900 places in Sydney. We hope that WheelEasy will soon feature on the mobile phones of every Australian who needs it.

www.wheeleasy.org

[Follow on Facebook](#)

Transport

Sometimes you'll need to transport your wheelchair in another vehicle to get where you want to go. Whether you want to travel in a car, train or aeroplane, there are a number of things you need to consider before setting out.



Cars

Cars that have been converted for drivers or passengers with a disability fall into two different categories: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV's) and Converted Vehicles. Deciding which type you will need depends on the nature of your disability.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV's)

WAV's have been structurally modified to allow a person to enter the car while still in their wheelchair. They are most commonly used by people in power wheelchairs or by people who are unable to easily transfer from their chairs. WAV's are available in a wide range of designs to suit either drivers or passengers with a disability. Most WAV's require structural modifications to be carried out to the car and can be very costly.

Converted Vehicles

The term Converted Vehicle describes a wide range of generally non-structural conversions or equipment designed to make it easier for a person with restricted mobility to use the vehicle. These conversions may help a person to drive, they may make it easier to get in or out of the car or they may be designed to stow bulky equipment like mobility scooters and wheelchairs. Depending on your needs, converting a vehicle might include anything from a spinner knob worth \$150, to specialised driving control equipment costing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Whether you are purchasing a WAV or a Converted Vehicle, it's important to do your research. Vehicles are a big investment, so make sure you take into account any changes that may occur to your family, your medical condition or your equipment over the next ten years. Before purchasing or converting your car, arrange a test drive in a suitable configured vehicle to make sure it meets your needs. Most importantly, never be afraid to ask questions or get a second opinion.





A-Z Guide on Disability Converted Cars



Everything you need to know about
buying, owning and maintaining a
disability converted vehicle

The Ultimate Guide For Drivers With A Disability

Given the constantly evolving technologies, there are a myriad of different options available to drivers and passengers with disabilities. We have created a comprehensive guide on everything you need to know about buying, owning and maintaining a wheelchair accessible or converted vehicle.

Some of the topics covered you will find in the guide include:

- Driver Assessments
- Modified Driving Controls
- Electronic Clutch
- Funding
- Imported Disability Cars
- Insurance
- Lifting Systems
- Storage Lifts
- Mobility Equipment Storage
- Maintenance,
- Parking
- Ramps
- Restraints
- Second Hand Vehicles
- Transferring
- Vehicle Certification and Compliance

**GET YOUR FREE
COPY NOW**



Taxis

Taxi regulations differ in each state and territory, however there are some basic rules which apply nation-wide. Manual and portable wheelchairs can usually be safely carried in all sorts of taxis, as long as they are folded and can fit in the boot or back seat. Electric wheelchairs can only be carried in a Wheelchair Accessible Taxi if they are fitted with four anchor points, allowing it to be safely used with the taxi's four-point tie down system.

In many areas, taxi drivers are allowed to charge a fee for assisting passengers with wheelchairs transport and securing their wheelchair into the car. This fee takes into account the extra time and effort that it takes to provide this service.

Most states and territories have a subsidy scheme available for people with limited mobility to help them cover the cost of taxi fares.



Planes

Most airlines have their own policies for carrying mobility aids like wheelchairs, so it's important that you speak to them directly when booking your ticket. When you contact the airline, they will want to know certain details about your wheelchair to make sure it can be carried safely so make sure you know the make and model of your wheelchair, the type of battery it uses (lithium, gel or led) and the battery's size (voltage and amp hours) before you call. Also take note of the size and weight of your wheelchair. Some batteries must be removed and carried as hand luggage. If this is the case for your wheelchair, make sure you have an appropriate box or carry-case for it. Some airlines may also require a verification of compliance certificate for your battery, these are available from your manufacturer or supplier.

Wheelchairs can sometimes be damaged in the baggage hold, so if you cannot take your wheelchair with you in the cabin, it's a good idea to take photos of its condition before you fly. If you do notice damage to your wheelchair on arrival, report it at the baggage claim area before you leave the airport.

It's a good idea to insure your wheelchair before you travel, and make sure you take your insurance policy with you in case you need to use it during your trip.



Click on your
state or territory
for information
about your local
subsidy scheme





Public Transport

The accessibility of public transport in Australia varies widely, not just from state to state, but between different modes of transport (buses, trains, trams and ferries) and sometimes even between different stops on a single route. Australia does have minimum standards for public transport, but these were introduced in 2002 and have a 30-year timetable for full implementation.

This means that it's vital to do your homework before setting out on your trip. Look up the website of your public transport provider and make sure you check the specific services and stops that you wish to use. If you're still unsure, it's best to phone the public transport provider directly to discuss

your needs. For some services, especially long-distance trains, you'll need to book an accessible space in advance.

If it's your first time using your wheelchair on public transport, it's a good idea to have a practise run first. Make a trip in an off-peak time, when you're not in a rush, just to familiarise yourself with using your wheelchair in this environment. Many public transport providers also run regular information days, when people with disabilities can explore vehicles at their leisure and ask questions of drivers and other staff.

Remember

If you plan to use public transport regularly, choose a wheelchair that fits within Australia's public transport standards. Accessible public transport is designed to accommodate wheelchairs that can fit within a 1300mm and 800mm space, with a maximum width of 750mm. The total weight of you, your wheelchair and your belongings shouldn't exceed 300kg. If your wheelchair fits within these parameters, you should be able to safely use accessible public transport in Australia.



Click on your
state or territory
for information
on accessible
public transport



Insurance

Simply put, wheelchairs are a vital and necessary part of many people's lives. This is why it makes sense to insure your wheelchair to protect yourself against unforeseen events.

A quality insurance policy should cover three important areas: accidental damage, third party liability and theft. Accidental damage to your wheelchair can happen at unexpectedly at any time even by the most experienced wheelchair users.

Third party liability insurance covers damage that your wheelchair might cause to other people or their property. These costs can quickly mount up as even minor accidents can result in large liability costs and you might find yourself facing a hefty bill if you don't have appropriate insurance.

Wheelchair theft is also on the rise and even if you take all the right precautions, sometimes you can still find yourself a target of unscrupulous people. A quality insurance policy will allow you to quickly and easily replace a stolen wheelchair, and any possessions that were in it when it was stolen.

Thankfully, you can protect yourself against the costs associated with mobility scooter accidents with Blue Badge Insurance. As specialists in mobility equipment insurance, we understand how important your mobility is to you. This is why our Comprehensive Wheelchair Insurance policy provides tailored benefits to help keep you moving if you have an accident.

Some of the benefits offered include:

- 1 Repair or replacement of a damaged wheelchair
- 2 Loss or damage by fire, theft, flood or vandalism to your wheelchair
- 3 Third party injury cover to protect you if you hit and injure somebody while using your wheelchair
- 4 Third party property cover to protect you if you hit and damage somebody's property (e.g. car) while using your wheelchair
- 5 Costs incurred to get you and/or your wheelchair home following an accident
- 6 Personal items that get lost, stolen or damaged while using your wheelchair

[Click here to see our full list of benefits](#)

It pays to insure your wheelchair. It will protect you against unexpected costs and will help get you back on your wheelchair as quickly as possible if you have an accident.

Call 1300 304 802 to insure your wheelchair with Blue Badge Insurance



Roadside Assistance

Roadside assistance is designed to help you if your wheelchair has a sudden breakdown or mechanical problem while you are out and about. No matter how well you maintain your wheelchair, there will be times when it breaks down. Roadside Assistance packages are designed to get you moving in just such an emergency.

Roadside Assistance mechanics come to you and can do basic repairs to get you moving. They don't usually carry batteries or new tyres, but can replace them if you have spares on hand.

We recommend that you always carry spare inner tubes and puncture kits with you for swift repairs. If the mechanic is unable to repair your wheelchair on the spot, they may be able to organise safe transport of your wheelchair and call you a taxi, a friend or carer to pick you up. It's important to note that Roadside Assistance mechanics aren't allowed to help you to transfer from your wheelchair, however they can help you to contact a friend or carer to do this for you. Roadside Assistance for wheelchairs isn't currently available in all states and territories. In New South Wales, roadside assistance is provided free for all mobility equipment users through the NRMA. You don't need to be a member of the NRMA to use this service, but tyre repairs may incur a fee. In South Australia the RAA provides repairs for wheelchairs to anyone who holds any kind of RAA Roadside Assistance package.

In Victoria and Western Australia you can purchase Roadside Assistance packages designed specifically for mobility equipment through the RACV or the RAC. If you have a Roadside Assistance package for your car with another company, it's worth contacting them to ask if they offer services for wheelchairs.

Remember

Roadside assistance is different to insurance. Insurance policies protect you against accidents and third party liability, whereas roadside assistance will help if you find yourself with a punctured tyre, flat battery or similar problem when you're using your wheelchair.



Be Careful

It's important to always remember to be careful and considerate of others when using your wheelchair. Although wheelchair users are classified as pedestrians, most wheelchairs are heavy pieces of machinery which means that they have the potential to cause serious injury in case of an accident. It's your responsibility to adapt to the conditions around you to ensure your own safety and the safety of the people around you.

Of course, it would be wonderful if pedestrians, drivers and other road users were more aware of wheelchair users, but in reality, this isn't always the case. They may not know how long it takes your wheelchair to stop, or they might not see you easily because you are at a lower height than most pedestrians. This means that you should always stay alert, be aware of what's going on around you and watch out for pedestrians distracted by mobile phones, kids playing and people on bikes or skateboards who may not always see you coming.

Top Safety Tips

Make sure you have the capacity to drive your wheelchair safely. Discuss this with your doctor or occupational therapist before you buy one, and have regular check-ups if your condition changes.

Stay alert to everything that's going on around you. Be aware of hidden driveways or shop doorways where vehicles or pedestrians may suddenly appear.

Be careful when crossing driveways. A lot of accidents happen when people back their cars out of driveways. Because wheelchair users are lower to the ground than other pedestrians, they can often be hidden by fences, hedges or other obstacles.

Understand the road rules applying to wheelchair use in your state or territory

Don't travel faster than the pedestrians around you. Weaving through busy crowds can cause an accident. Be patient and go with the flow of traffic.

Always cross the road at pedestrian crossings, even if it means you have to travel a little further. Your safety is worth it!

Drive to the conditions. Slow down if it's dark or wet and slippery.

Always travel on the footpath if there is one available. If there isn't and you are forced to travel on the road you must follow the same rules as other pedestrians. This means that you should face oncoming cars so that they can see you better.

Be careful around automatic or sliding doors. These are designed to open at a pace suitable for walking speed. If you're travelling too quickly you could hit the doors before they are fully open. Crashing into automatic doors is a common accident and if you harm the doors or building you could be liable for significant damages.

Remember that people are unpredictable. Children sometimes run in random directions, shoppers suddenly appear out of doorways. Travelling slowly will make sure you have time to react to what's going on around you.

Wheelchair Suppliers

AC Mobility

www.acmobility.com.au

Active Medical Supplies

www.activemedicalsupplies.com.au

Active Mobility Systems

www.activemobility.com.au

Advanced Mobility - Queensland

www.shoprider.com.au

Aidacare

www.aidacare.com.au

Alphacare - Newcastle

www.alphacare.com.au

Austech Medical - Queensland

www.austechmedical.com

Australian Mobility Equipment (AME) - Perth

www.amemobility.com.au

Complete Mobility and Rehab. - Queensland (Cairns)

www.completemobility.com.au

Dejay Medical

www.dejay.com.au

Geelong Wheelchairs

www.geelongwheelchairs.com.au

GMS Rehab

www.gmsrehab.com.au

GTK

www.gtk.com.au

Hospequip

www.hospequip.com.au

ILS Rehab

www.ilsrehab.com.au

Independent Mobility & Rehab

www.imr.net.au

Invacare Australia

www.invacare.com.au

KCF Disability Engineering

www.kcfdisabilityengineering.com.au

Keep Moving

www.keeppmoving.net.au

Magic Mobility

www.magicmobility.com.au

McLean Healthcare

www.mcleanhealthcare.com.au

Mobility Plus

www.mobilityplus.com.au

MOGO Wheelchairs

www.mogowheelchairs.com.au/products

Motion Wheelchairs

www.motionwheelchairs.com

Motum

www.motum.com.au

Newcastle Mobility

www.newcastlemobility.com.au

Ottobock Australia

www.ottobock.com.au

Paragon Mobility/KI Mobility

www.paragonmobility.com.au/ki-mobility

Permobil Australia

www.permobil.com.au

PME Group

www.pmegroup.com.au

Power Mobility

www.powermobility.com.au

Pride Australia

www.pridemobility.com.au

Push Mobility

www.pushmobility.com.au

Shoprider Australia

www.shoprider.com.au

Specialised Wheelchair Company

www.swco.com.au

Sunrise Medical

www.sunrisemedical.com.au

Tasmanian Wheelchair Specialists

www.taswheelchairs.com.au

The Rehabilitation Centre

www.therehabcentre.com.au

Think Mobility

www.thinkmobility.com.au

Unicare Health

www.unicarehealth.com.au

Wheelability

www.wheelability.com.au

Wicked Wheelchairs

www.wickedwheelchairs.com.au

Wild West Wheelchairs

www.wildwestwheelchairs.com

XtraCare Equipment - Adelaide

www.xtracareequipment.com.au

