

Who needs to use a power wheelchair?

Power mobility may be considered for someone who:

- Has no independent mobility appropriate for his/her age
- Has difficulty walking or pushing a manual wheelchair and cannot keep up with peers. The reason for obtaining a power wheelchair is to save energy or increase speed significantly.

Who needs to be seen by the I CAN Centre for Assistive Technology?

The I CAN Centre provides assessment and training for power mobility for the following clients:

- drivers who require training to learn how to drive safely
- drivers who are unable to drive with a standard joystick
- drivers who require extra features such as tilt/recline or ventilation equipment mounted.

Clients who can drive with a joystick and do not require training can have their power wheelchair ordered by their physical or occupational therapist.

What are the basic requirements for using a power wheelchair?

- A wheelchair-accessible environment where the power chair will be driven frequently and on a regular basis.
- The driver must be able to show
 - Understanding of cause and effect
 - Motivation to move and explore his/her environment
 - The ability to focus, or be refocused, on one activity for 15 minutes
 - The ability to follow directions and indicate correct answers
 - Adequate vision skills to be a safe and functional driver.
- Access to a trainer (caregiver, school aide, etc.) and appropriate space to train (e.g. large quiet hallways), if required
- A vehicle for safe transportation of a power wheelchair (school bus, DATS, private transport). Vehicles used to transport wheelchairs and clients must have approved tie-downs installed

How long will the assessment take?

Assessment and training for power mobility can be a lengthy process and involve several visits over weeks or months. It may include waiting (sometimes month) for specialized trial equipment. Each visit can last several hours. Power wheelchairs are available for short-term loan for assessment and training purposes.

What happens during the assessment?

The purpose of the assessment is to determine if the driver is able to safely operate a power wheelchair in a functional manner, and may or may not result in a power wheelchair being ordered. It is important that the client and caregivers attend all scheduled session and provide accurate feedback on progress. The assessment is a three-part process:

Part 1. Does the client understand what to do?

The first part of the assessment is done in a simulated manner using a manual wheelchair. The client must show that he/she understands the concepts of going straight, turning, stopping, and driving to a desired location. The client must be able to answer questions. This may be by pointing with a hand, or eye pointing, etc, whichever method is physically easiest to perform. If the client requires training, he/she is taught in this same manner in the client's own environment and a home program is provided. This allows the client to feel

comfortable and in control while learning at his/her own pace. The trainer, aide or caregiver may be present during training. The chosen trainer must attend one or more training sessions.

Part 2. How can the client physically drive a power wheelchair?

The client's physical abilities are assessed to determine what movements the client is able to make reliably and consistently in order to drive a power chair safely. These abilities are matched with appropriate mechanisms to drive the wheelchair, such as a joystick, switches, sip and puff system. The client must be in a supportive seat for the physical assessment. The physical assessment may take several sessions depending on the severity of the client's physical disability. Please be aware that much time may be needed to set up and prepare the power chair. Modifications may be made to commercially available control systems.

Part 3. Selecting which wheelchair is the right one

When the clinician has determined how the client will best drive the chair, other factors are considered in order to select the most appropriate wheelchair. These include:

- The need to use the same seating system in both power and manual wheelchairs
- The environment for driving, such as small spaces, rugged terrain, long distance travel, etc.
- Whether the power wheelchair fits in the client's vehicle (with/without the client)
- How the client transfers in and out of the wheelchair
- Proximity to a qualified service centre
- Whether the switches/joystick can be positioned quickly and easily on a daily basis
- The need for tilt and/or recline
- The need to mount ventilation equipment
- Planning for the future, by considering the potential need to grow the chair or change the method of driving
- Placement of switch/joysticks in conjunction with other equipment or devices on the wheelchair, such as a communication device
- Possible funding sources

A power chair with the desired features is then tested in the client's indoor and outdoor environment. It is vital to test loading the wheelchair containing the client into the family van before a final decision can be made. This prevents costly mistakes.

Who pays for the wheelchair?

Power wheelchairs are expensive. Power wheelchairs may be funded in part or fully by Alberta Aids to Daily Living, based on AADL eligibility criteria, or by private medical insurance. There are no guarantees that approval will be given by these agencies.

There may be additional costs for special features such as power tilt/recline, special mounting of switches or respiratory equipment, or some unique switches. The client/caregiver is responsible for these extra costs and may wish to apply to private medical insurance, funding agencies or community service groups for such items.

When is the power wheelchair ordered?

A decision to proceed with ordering a power wheelchair will be made when the client has clearly demonstrated the ability to drive safely (ie, stopping on command, stopping before hitting objects or people) and to drive functionally to a predetermined location without physical assistance. This decision is made in conjunction with the client/caregiver.

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