Information for prescribers

Wheelchair prescription and transport

The safest method of travel is to transfer into a vehicle seat and wear an occupant restraint (lap/sash seatbelt), or for children under 8 years of age, to sit in an Australian Standards Approved (ASA) child car seat as required by law.

When a wheelchair is prescribed to meet a person’s mobility, functional and postural needs, it is also important to consider the transport needs of the person using the wheelchair. However, wheelchairs that best suit a person’s mobility needs may not be suitable to use by an occupant in a vehicle.

When a decision has been made that transport in a wheelchair is the option of ‘less risk’ the following should be considered:

- The wheelchair frame does not require transit options in place in order to be safely secured in a vehicle. However, if a wheelchair has transit options attached, these must be used during transport.

- When there are no transit options available, then the frame (not the removable / detachable parts i.e. wheels, footplates, armrests) must be used to secure the wheelchair. Manufacturers will generally indicate / mark on the wheelchair frame where the tie downs are to be attached in these situations.

- Wearing an occupant restraint (lap/sash seatbelt) when travelling in a wheelchair is required by law. A lap/sash seatbelt is different to a pelvic belt, which is a postural support device. Pelvic belts and harnesses should be prescribed where required for postural support and are not required for travel.

- Trays and other equipment, mounted on the wheelchair, are to be removed for travel and secured safely in the vehicle.
When is a wheelchair suitable for use in transport?

Always refer to the manufacturer’s guidelines for information about the safe use of an occupied wheelchair in transport.

The following wheelchairs would not meet minimum practice standards for safe transport i.e. those with:
- low backs
- single pole seats
- insufficient base / frame to attach tie downs (when there are no transit options available)
- no headrest.

It is important to remember that crash testing:
- may not always be indicative of whether a wheelchair will withstand the forces of an impact
- occurs under specific conditions or set-up, i.e. speed of the vehicle, weight of the person, accessories of the wheelchair, and may not match the individual’s circumstances.

Wheelchairs for use in vehicles

Always adhere to best practice and refer to the relevant Australian/New Zealand Standards (AS/NZS) when working with people who need to travel in a wheelchair in a vehicle. It is recommended to use wheelchairs that meet AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 for transportation, where possible.

- The wheelchair has dimensions suited to the use of standardised wheelchair occupant restraint assemblies (AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section 6.3.2)
- The wheelchair has a high backrest or head support securely fastened to wheelchair uprights or fitted firmly into backrest tubing, with any metal crossbar effectively padded (AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section 4.2.3 & ZA2)
- Wheelchair hard trays are removed during vehicular transport and stored securely in the vehicle (AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section ZA6)
  NB: Fire / flame retardant foam trays if secured to the wheelchair, are permissible.
- Special seating (such as wooden inserts or moulded thermoplastics) are fastened securely to the wheelchair frame (AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section ZA2).

Further information

- The Independent Living Centre (ILC) at www.ilc.asn.au for specific resources.
- The Australian Standards relevant to the transportation of people seated in wheelchairs can be purchased from: http://infostore.saiglobal.com/store
  - AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 (Wheeled mobility devices for use as seats in vehicles)
  - AS/NZS ISO 16840.4:2014 (Seating Systems for use in motor vehicles)
  - AS/NZS 10542.1:2009 (Wheelchair tie down and occupant restraint systems – requirements and test methods for all systems)
  - AS/NZS 10542.2:2009 (Wheelchair tie down and occupant restraint systems - four point, strap type tie down systems).