Regional Eligibility Criteria for the provision of wheelchairs through the Northern Ireland Wheelchair Service

A guide for wheelchair users

This document is available in a range of formats or languages on request
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Introduction

This guide for wheelchair users has been produced by the Occupational Therapy Wheelchair Working Group, the Community Occupational Therapy Managers Forum and wheelchair users on behalf of the Wheelchair Service Reform Board. It outlines the process of how to get a wheelchair through the Northern Ireland Wheelchair Service.

The contents of this document have been drawn up to take account of the individual needs of wheelchair users and the range of wheelchairs available from the Northern Ireland wheelchair service.

General criteria for the provision of a wheelchair

All wheelchair users who use or plan to use the wheelchair service, must be eligible for registration under Section One of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (NI) 1978, as described below.

Wheelchairs will only be supplied to service users who need them for permanent use, i.e. longer than six months. Temporary loan arrangements are made locally for short term users, through the Red Cross, Shop Mobility or private wheelchair firms (Refer to Temporary loan section page 3).

The wheelchair user’s home environment or other essential environments need to be suitable or have potential to be made suitable for wheelchair use. Home Adaptations may be needed to ensure service user safety and to maximise accessibility e.g. door widening/access ramps.

The wheelchair user and/or their carer/care worker/personal assistant must have the potential to be able to use the equipment safely and effectively in the intended environment. This will be established during the assessment.

Transit wheelchairs are not normally provided to nursing or residential homes (Page 12 Nursing and Residential Homes).

A comprehensive assessment by an Occupational Therapist will take place for all wheelchair requests.
How to get a wheelchair

In Northern Ireland, wheelchair assessments are carried out by occupational therapists. A person needing a wheelchair permanently can ask their doctor or health and social care professional or self refer to the local community occupational therapist requesting a wheelchair assessment.

A person centred, comprehensive wheelchair assessment will be carried out at a mutually agreed time and place. An appropriate wheelchair from the Regional Disablement Services contract will be agreed to meet the individual’s needs.

It is important for anyone who is being assessed for a wheelchair to give as much information as possible about their condition, their physical and social needs, their expectations and proposed usage of a wheelchair, and to ask any questions that occur to them at the time of assessment. The information provided will help to ensure that the chosen wheelchair matches as much as possible the physical and social needs of the wheelchair user.

Short term use only – Temporary Loan Arrangements

Wheelchairs will only be supplied to service users who need them for permanent use, i.e. longer than six months. Health and social care trusts have arrangements locally for short term wheelchair use through community and voluntary organisations.

Individuals can contact the voluntary/community sector organisations directly. There may be a cost/donation associated with this. Other private suppliers may provide wheelchairs for short-term loan (Appendix A).
Eligibility Criteria

Standard transit wheelchair

Definition

This is a folding steel framed, attendant controlled wheelchair that cannot be propelled by the occupant.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:

• Cannot walk or can only walk a few metres unaided;

• Cannot, or is assessed as medically unfit to self-propel and requires assistance from a carer to aid indoor and outdoor mobility;

• Has a carer, care worker or a personal assistant available to push the wheelchair.

These wheelchairs are not provided to nursing or residential homes for portering (Page 12).

Lighter weight transit wheelchair

Definition

A lighter weight aluminium, folding frame, attendant controlled wheelchair that cannot be propelled by the occupant.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:

• Must meet the criteria for a standard transit wheelchair;

And

• The carer, who has a medical and/or physical condition, is unable to lift a standard steel framed wheelchair and requires a lighter weight wheelchair.
Standard self-propelling wheelchair

Definition

This is a folding, steel framed wheelchair, with large propelling wheels, for use indoors and outdoors to aid independent mobility.

It can also be pushed by an attendant.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:-

- Cannot walk or can only walk a few metres unaided;
- Must be physically able to self-propel the wheelchair independently and safely.

Note

- This type of chair may be supplied as a transit wheelchair, when the wheelchair user is unable to self-propel the wheelchair, e.g. the wheelchair may be easier for the carer to manoeuvre.

Heavy duty manual wheelchair

Definition

This is a heavy duty wheelchair which is manufactured and designed specifically to carry the heavier wheelchair user. To require a heavy duty wheelchair, the wheelchair user’s weight will exceed 19 stone.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:

- Will have their weight accurately measured and recorded (within one month of assessment);
- Will have their home environment assessed by a community occupational therapist as being suitable to ensure safe accessibility and manoeuvrability within the home environment and have adequate storage for the wheelchair.
Lighter weight self propelling wheelchair

Definition

This is a lighter weight, aluminium framed, self-propelled wheelchair which is more manoeuvrable and energy-efficient than the standard range of wheelchairs.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:

- Cannot manage to propel in a standard wheelchair;
- Depends on self-propelling the wheelchair;
- Is dependent on the wheelchair for the majority of daily living activities;
- Demonstrates a high level of motivation to use the wheelchair;
- Can demonstrate increased independence and adequate level of skills proficiency when using a lighter weight wheelchair.

These wheelchairs will not be provided solely for sports purposes.
Lighter weight / active wheelchair user

Definition

An ultra lightweight, highly configurable rigid or folding frame wheelchair manufactured in a lightweight metal (usually aluminium).

Criteria

The wheelchair user will:

- Meet the criteria for a lightweight wheelchair;
- Demonstrate an advanced level of proficiency skills e.g. back wheel balance;
- Be required to have potential to demonstrate a higher level of skills competency than needed for a lightweight wheelchair; or
- Drive and be able to independently transfer self and the wheelchair in/out of a car.

Tilt in space/recline manual wheelchair

Definition

This is a rigid or folding (generally only backrest folds flat onto seat) frame wheelchair which offers the dynamic seating and repositioning functions of a tilt in space and (in most cases) backrest recline and elevating leg rests.

Criteria

The wheelchair user will:

- Have a postural or medical need for a tilt in space/recline wheelchair where a standard wheelchair cannot meet their seating needs;
- Require a tilt in space wheelchair for mobility and transportation. They will not be issued as a substitute for specialised static seating when there is no mobility requirement.
Bariatric Manual Wheelchair

Definition

Bariatric wheelchairs are designed and constructed to carry wheelchair users who weigh 25 stone or more.

Criteria

The wheelchair user will:

- Exceed the manufacturer’s weight limit for a standard wheelchair;
- Have their weight accurately measured and recently recorded (within one month of assessment);
- Have their home environment assessed by a community occupational therapist as being suitable to ensure safe accessibility and manoeuvrability within the dwelling and have adequate storage for the wheelchair.

Note

If a carer has a medical and/or physical condition and needs to push the individual in their wheelchairs he/she may need a power pack.

Protocol

This equipment must only be specified by a suitably experienced occupational therapist.

A risk assessment should be completed in all cases.

Particular environmental factors to consider include load tolerance of floors in dwelling/ through floor lifts/ transport vehicles.
Electrically powered indoor wheelchair - EPIC

Definition

This is an electrically powered wheelchair for indoor use.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:

- Cannot walk or propel a manual wheelchair;

  or

- Has been medically advised that it is detrimental to their health to walk or self-propel a manual wheelchair;

  and

- Has been free from seizures/epilepsy for one year;

- Has suitable vision;

- Can demonstrate that he/she can operate the chair safely and responsibly without assistance;

- Can derive increased independence from use of a powered wheelchair;

- Has a suitable environment for the use of an indoor powered wheelchair and has adequate storage and battery charging facilities;

- For postural management tilt in space may be considered;

- A carer to assist with the charging of the wheelchair if the storage and charging point is remote from the living accommodation.
Electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchair (EPIOC)

Definition

This is an electrically powered wheelchair, which is controlled by the occupant for both indoor and outdoor use.

Criteria

The wheelchair user:

- Must meet the criteria for an indoor powered wheelchair (EPIC);
- Can demonstrate that he/she can operate the powered wheelchair safely and responsibly indoors and outdoors in a safety awareness assessment. Has visual, cognitive, spatial awareness, dexterity and no other medical conditions, which would make the wheelchair user a danger to themselves, pedestrians or other road users;
- Comply with the DVLC requirements for motor vehicle drivers concerning epilepsy and other causes of loss of consciousness;
- Be able to read a car number plate at 20 metres and have no major visual field limitation.

The wheelchair must be required for use both indoors and outdoors.

The wheelchair user must have a residential environment already (or suitable for adaptation) which is compatible with the use of an EPIOC, and which meets the criteria for an EPIC but also includes:

- Adequate and secure space for the storage of the wheelchair;
- a suitable location for charging the wheelchair;
- adequate space for movement of the wheelchair within the home;
- a carer to assist with the charging of the wheelchair if the storage and charging point is remote from the living accommodation;
- A comprehensive and person-centred assessment of the local outside environment to ensure that it is suitable for the safe use of the wheelchair.
Paediatric Buggy

Definition

This is a lightweight folding pushchair or buggy.

A buggy will be provided for a child, who has a permanent or long-term condition, which impairs his/her mobility.

Criteria

The buggy user will:

- Have a long-term medical condition that causes mobility impairment;

- Have needs which cannot be met by commercially available products, e.g. a standard buggy;

- Be unable to self-propel. If a child is assessed as being able to self-propel, a wheelchair rather than a buggy will be advocated.

Note

- Rain covers or sunshades for buggies will not be provided. Weather protection is considered to be the responsibility of the parent or carer.

Provision of additional wheelchair

Definition

A wheelchair is provided in addition to the user’s existing wheelchair.

These wheelchairs will be issued at the discretion of the heath and social care trust in line with the wheelchair user’s physical and social needs.
Nursing and Residential Homes

Residential Homes

Wheelchairs for independent use will be assessed in accordance with the Regional Eligibility Criteria for self-propelling, lighter weight and powered wheelchairs.

Tilt in space wheelchairs will not be issued as a substitute for specialised static seating, as they must also be required for mobility and transportation.

Nursing Homes

Wheelchairs will not be provided by the Regional Wheelchair Service for portering purposes. These should be supplied by the Nursing Home, which should have a pool of standard wheelchairs at a ratio of 1 chair per 5 residents for portering.

Wheelchairs will be provided for mobility if the user is attending day care or being regularly transported outside the home environment.
Specialised Seating

Definition

A custom-made seating system specifically designed to accommodate or control postural difficulties.

The seating system must be interfaced with a compatible mobility chassis.

Criteria

The wheelchair user will:

- Have a postural impairment and be assessed to be inadequately seated in all standard wheelchair seating available;
- Cannot maintain an unsupported sitting position in a standard or modified wheelchair;
- Require special seating to prevent the development or deterioration of postural problems, functional difficulties or pressure areas.

Protocol

All specialised seating is individually specified. Requests for specialised seating will be addressed by the health and social care trust specialist wheelchair occupational therapist, often in consultation with the bio engineer at Regional Disability Services (RDS), for screening and arrangement of an assessment for seating provision.

There is usually a joint clinical assessment involving the wheelchair users, therapists, carers and consultation with a bio engineer.
**Pressure Care Cushions**

Wheelchair cushions may be supplied for pressure care, and to correct and accommodate postural changes.

**Definition**

A cushion designed to prevent tissue damage from prolonged use of a wheelchair, improve posture or maintain comfort.

**Criteria**

The wheelchair user will:

- Possibly lack skin sensation and may be unaware of developing pressure problems;

- Require a cushion to prevent the development of pressure ulcers as they will have been assessed as being potentially at risk;

- Require a suitable pressure cushion to maintain or improve posture.

**Note**

- Pressure care cushions are usually provided only for use on the wheelchair user’s trust wheelchair.

- Pressure care cushions will not be issued to clients in nursing homes who use the wheelchair for transit purposes.

**Protocol**

Referrals will be accepted from GPs, therapists and other healthcare professionals.

Existing wheelchair users can refer themselves directly to their occupational therapist.

Requests will be screened and passed to the specialist wheelchair occupational therapist for advice and assessment where necessary.
Appendix A

Red Cross
Headquarters
12 Heron Road
Sydenham Business Park
Belfast
BT3 9LE
Tel: 028 9073 5350
www.redcross.org.uk

Portadown Loan Centre
Unit 5 Annagh Business Centre
Tandragee road
Portadown
BT62 3BQ
Tel: 028 3833 3415
(Opens Tuesday – Thursday 9.00 -2.30pm)

Ballymena Loan Centre
1st Floor Braidvalley Hospital
Ballymena
BT43 6HL
Tel: 07515 064526

Enniskillen Loan Centre
64 Mill Street
Enniskillen
BT74 6DW
Tel: 028 6632 6916

Derry/Londonderry
Red Cross Building/Stradreagh
Gransha Park
Clooney Road
Londonderry
BT47 6TF
Tel: 028 7186 5151
ntaylor@redcross.org.uk
Omagh Loan Centre
Unit 4 Gortrush Business Park
Gortrush Industrial Estate
Derry Road
Omagh
BT78 5EG
Tel: 028 8225 1116

Coleraine Loan Centre
2 Railway Place
Coleraine
BT52 1PQ
Tel: 028 7034 2569
(Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 9.30 -12.00)

Newcastle Loan Centre
21B Dundrum Road
Newcastle
Tel: 07738 944613
(Thursday am only)

Newry
St John of God Hospital and Newry Hospice
Courtney Hill
Newry
BT34 2EB
Tel: 07711 085279
(Thursday am only)

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