

## Manual Wheelchair Selection

Manual wheelchairs are used by people of all ages for a variety of reasons. People may have limited mobility due to poor strength. Endurance or coordination. This may be the result of a specific disability due to the effects of ageing. Furthermore, people may need to use a wheelchair occasionally, temporarily or permanently. This fact sheet discusses some of the important considerations for manual wheelchair selection.

It is recommended, that prior to buying a manual wheelchair, an individual seek advice from an Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist, regarding the most suitable wheelchair for their particular needs.



### ABILITIES OF THE USER

It is important to consider the user carefully, their diagnosis and prognosis, their method of propulsion and the style of transfers they will use to get in and out of the wheelchair.

The user's physical abilities such as arm and leg strength, skin integrity and endurance should be assessed to determine if any specialised seating or postural supports, such as a headrest, back support or harness are required for comfort or safety.



Storage and transport issues also need to be considered and the person's ability to maintain the wheelchair according to the manufacturer's instructions.

### ABILITIES OF THE CARER (if required)

Factors for consideration that relate to the carer include: the ease of propelling, dismantling, folding and transporting the wheelchair. Consider the ability of the carer to assist the user to transfer in and out of the wheelchair. Their ability to perform maintenance on the wheelchair should also be considered.



### FIT OF THE WHEELCHAIR

The correct fit of a wheelchair is essential for safety, comfort and function. Determining the correct fit requires accurate physical measurement of the user. An Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist is trained to do this. The main measurements required for a correct fit are the seat width, seat depth, backrest height, footplate height and armrest height.

Seat width: This must be wide enough that it does not rub on the hips but narrow enough that the user can easily reach the wheels to self propel.

Seat depth: This must be deep enough to provide good thigh support and weight distribution.

#### LifeTec Queensland

**BRISBANE**  
Level One, Reading Newmarket  
Cnr Newmarket & Enoggera Roads  
(PO Box 3241), Newmarket Qld 4051  
Phone: 07 3552 9000 or 1300 885 886  
Facsimile: 07 3552 9088

Email: [mail@lifetec.org.au](mailto:mail@lifetec.org.au)  
[www.lifetec.org.au](http://www.lifetec.org.au)  
Independent Living Centre  
Association of Queensland  
Incorporated trading as LifeTec  
Queensland ABN 25 773 960 273

**TOWNSVILLE**  
Shop G-3A, Domain Central  
103 Duckworth Street  
(PO Box 8280), Garbutt, Townsville Qld 4814  
Phone: 07 4759 5600  
Facsimile: 07 4759 5688





**Backrest height:** This is determined according to the support needs of the user. A rule of thumb for self propellers is approximately 2-5cm below the tip of the shoulder blade.  
**Seat to footplate and seat height:** These measurements should be such that the hips are positioned at approximately 90 degrees with the thighs parallel to the ground. There should also be a minimum of 5cm clearance under the footplates.



### **ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS**

The type of environment in which the person will use the wheelchair is important to consider. Access and manoeuvrability within commonly used environments such as the home, workplace and shops, need to be considered.

Floor coverings such as thick carpet may affect the ability to propel the wheelchair. Outdoor terrain; e.g. steep hills uneven ground, sand and distances covered by the user will also affect wheelchair selection or may indicate if powered mobility is a more suitable option.

### **FINANCIAL FACTORS**

Financial considerations include the initial cost of the wheelchair as well as ongoing maintenance/repairs. Some client's may be eligible for financial assistance through government funding e.g. Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme or Veterans' Affairs or through other avenues such as Insurance Companies or Charities.

### **NEED TO KNOW MORE?**

Telephone, fax or e-mail your enquiry to obtain further information from one of the therapists' about products. Alternatively, you can make an appointment to trial the equipment at our display centres or through our outreach service. Please phone LifeTec for further details.

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