



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Office of Integrated Health Health & Safety Alert/Information

How to Obtain a New Customized Wheelchair for an Individual with IDD Health & Safety Alert

Introduction

For a non-ambulatory individual with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) a new wheelchair is very important for maintaining comfort, support, and independence, especially as mobility needs and physical conditions change over time. A well-fitted wheelchair can improve posture, reduce risk for pressure injuries, and allow for greater movement and participation in daily activities.

A customized wheelchair supports person-centered care for individuals with IDD because they can be tailored to an individual's unique needs, goals, and preferences, along with helping maximize their self-sufficiency and improve over-all functioning.

Obtaining the right wheelchair for the right person can be a lengthy process which requires a team effort. The team may consist of the individual's family members, licensed provider agency, support staff, support coordinator, primary care provider (PCP), a physical therapist (PT), or occupational therapist (OT), an Assistive Technology Professional (ATP), and the Durable Medical Equipment (DME) representative.

The Office of Integrated Health Supports Network (OIHSN) has developed a companion alert to this one titled "Wheelchair Assessment Considerations" which is based on information that one might need to know about how to be prepared for the wheelchair assessment and what to expect during the wheelchair assessment.



Medicaid Funding Guidelines for Wheelchairs

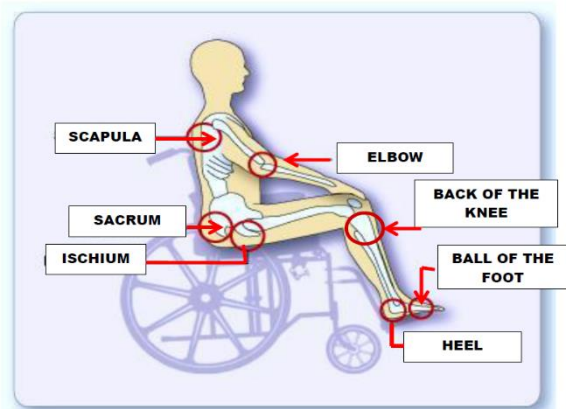
Wheelchairs are typically funded every 5 years for individuals with Medicaid. However, funding may be approved sooner, if the individual has:

- A change in physicality, strength, or coordination.
- Weight loss or weight gain.
- A stroke or other major health event which impacts the individual's overall functioning.
- A recent injury, surgery or hospitalization.
- Recently new diagnosed serious illness.
- Recently new diagnosed chronically debilitating medical condition.

Signs and Symptoms a New Wheelchair or Seating Assessment is Needed

Some key observations which should prompt support staff to ask the individual's PCP for a referral for a seating assessment include the following:

- The individual has had their current wheelchair for more than 5 years.
- Leaning to the side or sliding out of the wheelchair.
- use of any item such as pillows, wedges, etc. to prevent movement such as leaning or sliding.
- Indications of discomfort or pain. This may be exhibited through verbal complaints or behaviors such as crying, whining or calling out.
- Sliding, slumping, or leaning while in the wheelchair.
- Agitation or restlessness while in the wheelchair with no other known cause.
- A low wheelchair tolerance for sitting in their wheelchair.
- New or worsening skin integrity issues, redness, skin breakdown or pain in any of the following high-risk pressure injury areas for wheelchair users, or any other area of the skin or body.



Carefully look at the individual's posture and functional ability while they are in the wheelchair and consider the following:

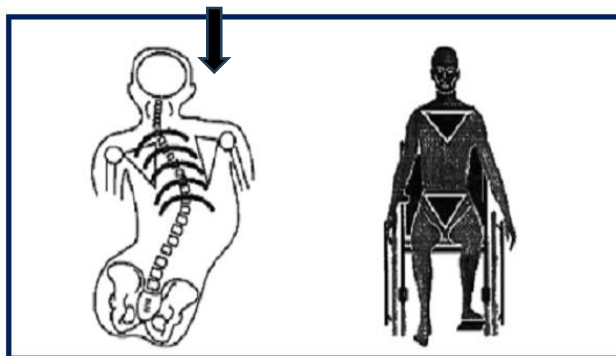
- Does the individual seem comfortable when sitting in their wheelchair, or do they seem restless and uncomfortable?
- Are arms positioned well on armrests, or do they slip off?
- Does the seat back seem too high or too low?
- Is the individual able to keep their feet on the footrest easily?
- Does the wheelchair seem too big or too small?
- Is the individual exhibiting any facial indicators of discomfort or pain such as grimacing?
- Has the individual slipped out of, fallen out of, or been injured in any other way, while in their wheelchair?

Look for the following visual signs which indicate a seating assessment is needed:

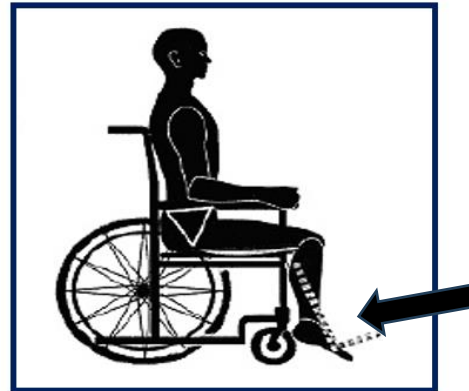
- Slouching or leaning forward, backward, to the left, or to the right, while in wheelchair.



- Insufficient trunk support.



- Slipping or sliding on wheelchair seat bottom and/or is the individual's feet repeatedly slip off footrests.



Step-By-Step Process For Obtaining A New Customized Wheelchair

Step 1:

The first step is recognizing the need for a seating assessment based on a behavior, a complaint, a visual sign, symptom, a health status change, etc.

Step 2:

Next, share your concerns with the person who schedules PCP appointments for the individual.

Caregiver Tip: The person you share the information with may be your supervisor, the program manager, the case manager, the individual's legal guardian, the individual's parents, etc. For those individuals who are higher functioning, and are their own guardian, this may mean having a discussion with them and assisting them with scheduling an appointment and setting up transportation to the appointment.

Step 3:

Schedule an appointment with the individual's PCP to review the individual for a possible new wheelchair.

Step 4:

Schedule transportation or transport the individual to their PCP appointment.

Caregiver Tip: It is always a good idea to have someone knowledgeable about the individual and familiar with the individual to accompany them for medical appointments whenever possible.

Step 5:

While at the PCP appointment, explain the problem/issue to the PCP, (or help the individual explain the reasons).

Caregiver Tip: Have someone who knows the individual well accompany the individual to the PCP appointment to make sure the PCP knows about any issues the individual is currently having with his/her current wheelchair (comfort, safety, etc.) and will carefully consider these factors when writing the prescription for the PT/OT assessment.

Step 6:

Ask the PCP for a prescription for a PT assessment for a new wheelchair.

Caregiver Tip: In addition to the new wheelchair assessment, ask the PCP for a written prescription/RX for an OT assessment (in addition to the PT RX). This will cover an assessment for any other equipment which may be useful to/for the individual. Some examples: a shower chair, alternate adaptive seating (in case the wheelchair needs repairing), a gait trainer, adaptive eating utensils, etc. *Rationale: when the individual is assessed for the wheelchair, the PT/OT may see the need for other equipment, in addition to the new wheelchair.*

Step 7:

Schedule the appointment for the new wheelchair assessment.

Caregiver Tip: Be sure to let the person scheduling the appointment know there is also have a prescription for an OT assessment to see if there are any other needs the individual has that are not being met. They may ask you which durable medical equipment (DME) vendor you want to use. If you have a preference, let them know. If you do not make a choice, they will choose one for you. If the individual is at high risk for a pressure injury and/or has a history of pressure injury, let the scheduler know and see if pressure mapping is available at the appointment. If not, ask for a referral to a wheelchair/seating clinic that does pressure mapping. Most community PTs do not have access to a pressure mapping device, you will typically only see these at wheelchair/seating clinics.

Step 8:

Go to the PT/OT assessment with the individual. (The OT, PT & DME vendor will also be there.)

Caregiver Tip: A healthcare professional must be physically or virtually present at the new wheelchair assessment. A DME vendor (wheelchair salesperson) in the Commonwealth of Virginia is not allowed to do an assessment for a customized (CRT) wheelchair without a licensed healthcare professional being present per 12VAC30-50-165. (Licensed healthcare professionals such as a physician, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a registered nurse, etc.)

Step 9:

Provide input to the PT, OT and/or DME vendor representative.

Caregiver Tip: Have someone who knows the individual well, accompany the individual to the PT assessment and make sure the PT/OT knows about any issues the individual is currently having with his/her current wheelchair (comfort, safety, etc.) so the PT is aware of the issue during the assessment process and will carefully consider these factors when choosing the new wheelchair.

Step 10:

The PT/OT and DME vendor writes up the order for the new wheelchair and the Letter of Medical Necessity and sends it to the individual's PCP for edits, additions, and signature.

Caregiver Tip: Be sure to have the DME vendor order any tie-downs which will be needed for accessible vehicle transport. If the tie-downs are not submitted with the order for the new wheelchair, they may not be covered by Medicaid or private insurance.

Caregiver Tip: It is also an OT's or PT's job to write the letter of medical necessity (LMN) that helps the insurance company understand the relationship between the individual's mobility needs, their medical diagnosis/positioning needs and the equipment that is recommended for them. (See the Letter of Medical Necessity section within this document for more detailed information.)

Step 11:

The individual's PCP returns the signed order and LMN to the DME vendor. This process can be streamlined by sending the LMN to the vendor so they can send a package of documents which includes the certificate of medical necessity (CMN) to the PCP for signature vs single pages which can be easily misplaced.

Step 12:

The DME vendor sends the signed order and LMN to Medicaid/Medicare/Private Insurance, etc. for approval.

Step 13:

Everyone waits for insurance approval which can take several weeks to months.

Step 14:

When Medicaid or the private insurance company approves funding for the wheelchair, the DME vendor will place the order with the manufacturer. After the order is placed, it can take as long as 3-6 months for the equipment to arrive.

Caregiver Tip: If the individual you care for is in desperate need of the new wheelchair, please contact the MRE Team at mreteam@dbhds.virginia.gov to see if the MRE Team has a donated wheelchair that can be used by the individual in the interim. The OIH PT will need to do an assessment of the individual to ensure proper fit of the donated wheelchair before it can be used, and the individual's PCP will need to write an order for its use.

Step 15:

The DME vendor will notify the caregiver and/or individual when the new wheelchair arrives to schedule an appointment for delivery and fitting.

Step 16:

The new wheelchair delivery appointment and fitting.

Caregiver Tip: Make sure someone who regularly works with the individual is present when the new wheelchair is delivered and adjusted to fit, so all issues, problems & questions can be addressed at that time. A new wheelchair usually only comes with a limited warranty (6-12 months). This will vary depending on the vendor and the new wheelchair.

Step 17:

Sometimes it is necessary to schedule a follow-up appointment with the PT/OT to determine frequency and duration of use (the protocol/order) for the DME and/or to ensure fit and functioning.

Caregiver Tip: It is the provider's responsibility to contact the PT with any issues the individual has with the new DME. The OT/PT may have the individual return for another visit for adjustments, etc. once the DME arrives.

Step 18:

The PCP will write a protocol/order (RX) for DME use, based on the PT/OT's recommendations.

Caregiver Tip: The caregiver should ask the PT for any specific instructions on how they want the individual to use and/or be placed in their wheelchair and the frequency of their use. The PT will write their recommendations and will send them to the PCP. The caregiver will then need to pick up the RX/order from the physician's office. It is the provider's responsibility to contact the PT with any issues the individual has with the new DME. The OT/PT may have the individual return for another visit for adjustments, etc. once the DME arrives.

Step 19:

Pick up the RX/order (the signed protocol) from the PCP.

Caregiver Tip: Remember that all providers still have to obtain a prescription for their use from the individual's PCP, before use of any type of DME even if the wheelchair is obtained online, at Walmart, or at a local yard sale.

Step 20:

Train support staff to follow the order/protocol.

Caregiver Tip: There will need to be a written RX/order for the equipment's use at each location the individual regularly spends time (the group home, the day program, employment, etc.).

Caregiver Tip: It can be helpful to videotape the PT going through the steps required to place the individual in their wheelchair. Be sure to also videotape either the PT or the DME vendor attaching and fastening seatbelts, harnesses, footrests, trays, cupholders, iPad holders, or any other customized or adaptive equipment, so the process can be accurately taught to the staff at the group home, day support, etc.

Step 21:

Observe staff to make sure they are correctly following the order/protocol and are proficient.

Caregiver Tip: Licensed provider agencies should have a written protocol (signed order) in place that will let their support staff know the proper procedure for placing the individual in the wheelchair which should include safety concerns, health concerns, risks, etc. Support staff will also need to be trained to ensure they understand all aspects of the written protocol and have a chance to ask questions.

Caregiver Tip: Although a little time consuming, the narrative instructions from the video(s) can be listened to and then typed up, and screenshots of the videos taken to develop a printable training sheet to reinforce all steps and features of the wheelchair. If videotaping, make sure you have the legal guardian's, parents, etc. permission, and that you are complying with your agency or provider policy, HIPAA regulations, etc.

Step 22:

Reschedule an appointment with the OT or PT if any signs or symptoms arise which indicate the wheelchair is causing the individual discomfort.

Caregiver Tip: See the signs and symptoms a new wheelchair or seating assessment is needed section within this document for more detailed information.

Letter of Medical Necessity (LMN)

A letter of medical necessity (LMN) is a formal document provided by a licensed healthcare provider. An LMN explains why a specific treatment, product, piece of medical equipment, medication, or medical service is needed for a patient's health and well-being.

What is typically included in an LMN?

- The individual's personal information to include the individual's name, date of birth, address, and contact information.
- The individual's Primary Care Provider (PCP) or other medical specialist's information. The licensed healthcare provider's name, credentials, and contact information.
- Date and healthcare professional's signature. It should be signed and dated by the same healthcare provider as listed on the LMN.
- The individual's medical condition and diagnosis. A description of the individual's medical condition, including the diagnosis, medical history and duration (since birth or other) of the condition.
- Recommended medical treatment or intervention should be defined. The treatment, medication, procedure or medical equipment deemed necessary by the healthcare provider.
- Explanation of medical necessity to include why the recommended treatment is medically necessary for the individual's health and wellbeing.
- Any supporting documents. Test results or medical records to provide proof or further justification to help verify the medical necessity of the equipment.

Resources

Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services - For published electronic and printable copies of all DMAS Provider Manuals and Medicaid Memoranda, go to the DMAS Web Portal at: <https://www.virginiamedicaid.dmas.virginia.gov/wps/portal/>

Virginia's Medicaid Managed Care Plans

As of July 1, 2025, Virginia Medicaid will have 5 Managed Care Plans:

- Aetna Better Health of Virginia: [Aetna Medicaid Virginia](#)
- Anthem Health Keepers Plus: [Anthem](#)

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- NEW Humana Healthy Horizons of Virginia: [Humana Healthy Horizons](#)
- Sentara Health Plans: [Sentara Health Plans](#)
- United Healthcare of the Mid-Atlantic, Inc: [UnitedHealthcare Community Plan](#)

PMD (powered mobility devices) Service Pre-Authorizations

For resources for submitting service pre-authorizations for PMD wheelchairs, please go to the Acentra Health Website at: <https://dmas.kepro.com>

For any questions regarding the submission of service pre-authorization requests for PMDs, please contact Acentra Health at: 888-827-2884 or 804-622-8900.

For general coverage questions about wheelchairs and accessories, please see the downloadable Virginia DMAS pdf: [Medicaid Durable Medical Equipment \(DME\) And Supplies Listing](#).

Service Authorization Questions

For questions about Service Authorizations for the CL Waiver, please see the

- [Provider Manual Title: Developmental Disabilities Waivers \(BI, FIS, CL\)](#)
- [\(Revision Date: 10/10/2024\).](#)
- [Appendix D: Service Authorization for DD Waiver Services](#)

Sample Letters of Medical Necessity for DME and Assistive Technology (AT):

- <https://www.metlife.com/stories/benefits/letter-of-medical-necessity/#:~:text=I%20am%20writing%20on%20behalf,any%20enclosures%5D%20for%20further%20details>
- [https://www.dati.org/funding/lmn/sampleALL.htm#:~:text=LMN%20SAMPLE%20%231&text=To%20Whom%20It%20May%20Concern,Communication%20Device%20\(speech%20prosthesis\).](https://www.dati.org/funding/lmn/sampleALL.htm#:~:text=LMN%20SAMPLE%20%231&text=To%20Whom%20It%20May%20Concern,Communication%20Device%20(speech%20prosthesis).)
- https://www.rehabmart.com/pdfs/ltr_3.pdf?srsId=AfmBOorbR9DluX4rx1rCAz8ubihRkh3xbrSfLXW76ovk2jMlqP_PQgfO
- <https://primeengineering.com/letters-of-medical-necessity>
- <https://freedomconcepts.com/resources/medical-justification/>

PERS/EM/AT Providers:

- [EM and AT Provider List](#)
- [PERS Provider List](#)
- [Member Guide for Environmental Modifications and Assistive Technology](#)

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12. [Klinich, K. D., Manary, M. A., Orton, N. R., Boyle, K. J., & Hu, J. \(2022\). A literature review of wheelchair transportation safety relevant to automated vehicles. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19\(3\), 1633.](#)

To the best of the OIHSN Nursing Team's knowledge the information contained within this alert is current and accurate. If the reader discovers any broken or inactive hyperlinks, typographical errors, or out-of-date content please send email to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov to include the title of the Health & Safety alert with specifics details of concern.

How to Obtain a New Customized Wheelchair Quiz/Evaluation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Email Address: _____

Quiz:

1. For a non-ambulatory individual with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) a new wheelchair...
 - a. Can't do anything more than the old wheelchair did.
 - b. Is important for maintaining comfort, support, and independence.
 - c. Is not necessary and is impossible to get.
 - d. Is not important to maintaining comfort, support, and independence.
2. Obtaining the right wheelchair for the right person can...
 - a. Be a lengthy process which requires a team effort.
 - b. Be very easy and can be done in 24 hours.
 - c. Be done by a single support staff member.
 - d. Be a waste of time because getting the right wheelchair is impossible.
3. A customized wheelchair supports person-centered care for individuals with IDD because they can be ...
 - a. Designed to maximize self-sufficiency and improve over-all functioning.
 - b. Painted in their favorite color and/or pattern.
 - c. Tailored to an individual's unique needs, goals, and preferences.
 - d. A & C.
4. Wheelchairs are typically funded by Medicaid for individuals every _____ years.
 - a. 2 1/2.
 - b. 7.
 - c. 5.
 - d. 3.
5. Individualized funding for a new wheelchair can occur whenever...
 - a. There is noticeable weight loss or weight gain.
 - b. There is change in physicality, strength, or coordination.
 - c. There is a recent injury, surgery or hospitalization.
 - d. There is a newly diagnosed chronically debilitating medical condition.
 - e. All of the above.
6. What are some signs an individual might need a new wheelchair?
 - a. When an individual is sliding, slumping, or leaning while in the wheelchair.
 - b. When an individual is completely comfortable in their wheelchair.
 - c. When an individual expresses low tolerance for sitting in their wheelchair.
 - d. A & C.
7. Who is the first healthcare professional required to be involved in the process of obtaining a new wheelchair?
 - a. A Durable Medical Equipment (DME) representative.
 - b. A Primary Care Provider (PCP).
 - c. An Occupational therapist (OT).
 - d. A physical therapist (PT).

How to Obtain a New Customized Wheelchair Quiz/Evaluation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Email Address: _____

8. Along with obtaining a prescription order for a new wheelchair from the PCP what other assessment is recommended you ask the PCP to write an order for?
 - a. An assessment by an OT or PT.
 - b. An assessment by a Speech Language Pathologist.
 - c. An assessment by another PCP.
 - d. An assessment by Orthopedic surgeon.
9. A DME vendor (wheelchair salesperson) in the Commonwealth of Virginia is not allowed to do an assessment for a customized (CRT) wheelchair without...
 - a. Doing all the wrong paperwork first.
 - b. A licensed healthcare professional being present.
 - c. Standing on one foot and patting their head.
 - d. All of the above.
10. What documents are required to be signed by the individual's PCP for the insurance approval process to happen?
 - a. A written prescription for a new wheelchair assessment.
 - b. The Letter of Medical Necessity (LMN).
 - c. The wheelchair assessment completed by an ATP.
 - d. Certificate of medical necessity (CMN).
 - e. All of the above.
11. How long can the insurance approval process take for a new wheelchair?
 - a. No more than two weeks.
 - b. Several months to years.
 - c. Several weeks to a month.
 - d. Several minutes to hours.
12. Once the DME company has placed the order for the wheelchair, how long can it take before the new wheelchair is delivered?
 - a. It can take between 3 to 6 months for the equipment to arrive.
 - b. It can take as long as 12 years for the equipment to arrive.
 - c. It can take between 3 to 6 days for the equipment to arrive.
13. Who will notify the individual when the wheelchair has been delivered and is ready for fitting?
 - a. The PCP who wrote the initial prescription for the wheelchair.
 - b. The DME vendor who order the wheelchair.
 - c. The OT/PT who assisted with the wheelchair assessment.
 - d. The MRE team who provides wheelchair repairs.
14. After the wheelchair is delivered and fitted, why might a follow-up appointment with the DME vendor/CRT vendor be needed?
 - a. To make sure the wheelchair is the individual's favorite color.
 - b. To help develop a protocol to instruct support staff on wheelchair use for the individual.
 - c. To ensure the fit and function of the wheelchair has not changed.
 - d. B & C.

How to Obtain a New Customized Wheelchair Quiz/Evaluation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Email Address: _____

15. What is the Letter of Medical Necessity (LMN)?

- a. A document that explains all of an individual's medical history and surgeries beginning from when they were first born.
- b. A formal document explaining why a specific treatment, product, piece of medical equipment, medication, or medical service is needed for a patient's health and well-being.
- c. It is a formal document supplied by an individual's insurance company explaining specifically why a new wheelchair cannot be provided.
- d. It is the initial signed prescription assessment order from the individual's PCP to the DME company.

Evaluation:

- 1. Was the information presented in this Health & Safety Alert helpful?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- 2. Will you use this Health & Safety Alert information to train other staff?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- 3. Will you attend the Regional Nursing Meeting to obtain the Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) unit for this Health & Safety Alert?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but I would have attended the meeting regardless
 - c. No
 - d. No, I am not a nurse
- 4. What topic(s) would you like to have presented in a Health & Safety Alert for CNE's?

5. Other Comments:
