

# WHEELCHAIR GUIDE



**Carers  
Support**  
West Sussex



# Wheelchair and Seating Service

Did you know, NHS Sussex Community Foundation Trust has a Wheelchair and Seating Service that provides wheelchairs to people who have a permanent disability and whose ability to walk is permanently restricted. They will loan a wheelchair to anyone who has a long-term mobility problem and is classified as unable, or virtually unable to walk indoors or outdoors. Please note: Short-term wheelchair loans (less than 6 months) are not provided. Referrals are accepted from health and social care professionals and criteria will need to be met to access the service.

For more information, please visit NHS Sussex Community Foundation Trust or the appropriate locality team listed opposite.

Disclaimer: This is intended as a guide only. Carers Support West Sussex does not endorse any wheelchair specialists.



Contact details for the 4 wheelchair locality teams are:

## **Brighton & Hove locality**

Sussex Rehabilitation Centre  
Brighton General Hospital  
Elm Grove  
Brighton BN2 3EX  
Tel: 01273 242156 or 242157  
SC-TR.wheelchairadmin@nhs.net

## **Bognor locality (covering Bognor Regis, Chichester, Harting, Littlehampton, Loxwood, Midhurst, Petworth)**

Richard Hotham Unit  
Bognor Regis War Memorial Hospital  
Shripney Road  
Bognor Regis PO22 9PP  
Tel: 01243 623650  
sc-tr.wheelchairservicebognor@nhs.net

## **Horsham locality (covering Burgess Hill, Copthorne, Crawley, East Grinstead, Haywards Heath, Horsham, Pulborough)**

Horsham Hospital  
Hurst Road  
Horsham RH12 2DR  
Tel: 01403 620454  
sc-tr.wheelchairservicehorsham@nhs.net

## **Worthing locality (covering Findon, Henfield, Pulborough, Rustington, Shoreham, Southwick, Storrington, Worthing)**

Sussex Rehabilitation Centre  
Brighton General Hospital  
Elm Grove  
Brighton BN2 3EX  
Tel: 01273 265850  
sc-tr.wheelchairserviceworthing@nhs.net

# Carer Equipment Service

## Purchasing your own wheelchair

If you are unable to access a wheelchair via the Wheelchair and Seating Service or you would like to access a lightweight wheelchair that is not available via that service, Carers Support West Sussex is currently able to consider making a grant to you (maximum amount of £150) towards the purchase cost of a wheelchair. Each request will be considered on an individual basis and payment made directly to you to purchase the wheelchair.



As there is so much to consider when purchasing a wheelchair to ensure your needs as a carer and that of your loved one are met, we recommend you seek specialist guidance from a wheelchair specialist. There are many organisations which offer this service, but include and are not restricted to the following:

### **Complete Care**

07516 502773

### **Clearwell Mobility**

01444 253 300

Once you have taken specialist advice, if you would like to discuss further how you may be able to make an application for funding towards the purchase of a lightweight wheelchair, please contact us:

### **Carers Support West Sussex**

[info@carerssupport.org.uk](mailto:info@carerssupport.org.uk)

0300 028 8888

[www.carerssupport.org.uk](http://www.carerssupport.org.uk)

# Wheelchairs

(The following information has been produced and is to be used as a guide only. It does not replace specialist advice which Carers Support West Sussex recommend is obtained.)

There are 2 main types of manual wheelchair available with each meeting different needs and requirements. All wheelchairs however are described either as Self Propelled or Attendant Propelled (sometimes known as Transit).

## **Attendant Propelled Wheelchairs (Transit)**

If you are not strong enough to propel yourself and intend to rely on someone else pushing the chair, you need an attendant propelled or transit wheelchair. These have smaller rear wheels and can be easier to manoeuvre for the person pushing.

## **Self Propelled Wheelchairs**

Self Propelled wheelchairs are primarily designed to allow the occupant of the chair to push or propel themselves along without the need of somebody pushing the chair.

They are designed with larger wheels at the back of the wheelchair with push-rims which allow the occupant to easily manoeuvre themselves along using their upper body strength.

These chairs normally have pushing handles on the back that, where needed, somebody can push the occupant as well. The larger back wheels can be an advantage when being pushed up kerbs or over other obstacles.



# Points you may wish to consider when choosing a wheelchair

## Overall Weight

The weight of the wheelchair is important if you are intending to transport it by car and it can also affect how difficult the chair is to push. The lighter the frame the easier it will be to lift and put into the car and the easier and more manoeuvrable to push the occupant. Most standard chairs are constructed with a steel frame and more lightweight chairs are generally made from an aluminium frame.

Another factor to bear in mind when thinking about weight, is the number of detachable parts to the wheelchair. Most wheelchairs have detachable footplates, but some also have removable arms and wheels. This can greatly reduce the weight of the chair when lifting making a steel frame an option.



## Storage

Most wheelchairs fold upwards by pulling up on the seat. This operates a scissor action folding mechanism, pulling the wheels together. Dependent on the specific type of wheelchair, a range of parts may also be detachable such as the footrest, arms and wheels.

## Usage Frequency

The frequency of which you will use the wheelchair is also a key factor when making your decision. Some wheelchairs are designed for infrequent use, such as for short trips to appointments or the shops, whereas others are more suited to frequent and constant use.

It is important to make sure the wheelchair you select will be suitable for your frequency of use as choosing one which is designed for sporadic use will not be durable enough for constant use every day.

Wheelchairs which are designed for frequent use offer more comfort and pressure relief for the occupant and provide a more comfortable experience.



### Wheels

Rear wheels will either be pneumatic (air) tyres or solid rubber. Pneumatic tyres offer better shock absorption than solid ones but can puncture. Solid tyres have the benefit of being puncture proof but give the occupant a slightly harder ride. Many rear wheels have a quick release button, which enables them to be removed quickly. This aids transportation by reducing the overall size of the chair.

The front castors normally have solid tyres, which will swivel a full 360 degrees. There can also be small wheels at the rear of the frame which are called anti-tip wheels and are normally positioned a few inches from the floor. These wheels are there to stop the wheelchair tipping backwards and are a useful safety feature for self-propel wheelchairs. Anti-tip wheels can be a bit of an impediment by restricting the gradient that you can climb which may be frustrating where you have an assistant pushing you. For this reason, most anti-tip wheels are height adjustable and can be removed altogether if needed.

### Footplates

Most footrests swing away outwards or sometimes both outwards and inwards. Having swing away footplates is important for safe transfers allowing you to stand at the front of the chair without having to step over the footplates. Being able to remove the footplates altogether is also important for transporting the wheelchair as it reduces the overall size of the frame.

### Armrests

The arms on a wheelchair are essential for support whilst seated. However, they can become an obstacle to transferring, particularly if you use a transfer board. For this reason, many wheelchairs have detachable armrests which can be removed to allow sideways transfers. This can also be of benefit when transporting the chair by making the frame lighter when removed.

An alternative to detachable arms is to have swing up arms which pivot at the back. This has the advantage of not having to completely remove the arm and find somewhere to put it whilst transferring. Some chairs have armrests which swing up and are



detachable. One other impediment that arms can be responsible for is preventing access to tables. The normal height of an armrest does not allow the user to sit up to a table as the arms hit the edge of the table. For this reason, designers have developed cut away armrests which are a lower height nearer the legs and allow the wheelchair to be pushed further under the table.

Some of the more sophisticated wheelchairs incorporate height adjustable armrests. This is particularly useful where you need to use a pressure cushion in the wheelchair which may add several inches to your seated position.

### **Brakes**

These will normally be manual brakes mounted near the rear tyres.

Some attendant propelled chairs have brakes fitted near the pushing handles. This gives greater control to the attendant and can help slow the wheelchair when descending steep hills or ramps. The user cannot apply the brakes themselves.



## Assessing the Correct Size

As well as choosing the right wheelchair for your needs, it is equally important to select the right size of wheelchair for the occupant. Choosing the incorrect size of wheelchair can lead to pressure sore issues, damage to wheelchair and warranty issues.

### **User Weight**

All wheelchairs have a maximum user weight. You should never exceed this as it will invalidate any warranty and it can lead to the wheelchair becoming dangerous. The normal weight limit for most standard chairs is around 18 stone. If you weigh in excess of 18 stone, you should look for a heavy-duty wheelchair.

### **Seat Size**

It is essential to ensure that the seat size is suitable. You need to ensure that wherever possible weight is evenly distributed over the seat area. This will provide the most comfortable sitting position and help prevent any pressure sores from forming. Most wheelchairs have height adjustable footplates which enable a comfortable seated position. As the footplates are height adjustable the actual height of the seat is less important when



buying a wheelchair than it is for an armchair. However, if you do find it difficult to get up from a wheelchair a higher seat may be beneficial.

The ideal seat width should give sufficient room to be comfortable but not too wide so that you don't have the support of the arm rests. If the seat is too wide, you may lean more to one side in order to feel supported. A seat that is too narrow, will be uncomfortable and can increase the risk of pressure sores. Don't forget to include your outdoor clothing (i.e. your winter coat), when measuring up for a wheelchair. Many of the standard manual wheelchairs come in different seat widths the most common being 16", 18" and 20". The most popular width is 18".

The seat depth is also an important factor. If the seat is too short, the full length of the thighs will not be supported and too much pressure will be transferred onto the buttocks. If the seat is too long, it may cause undue pressure behind the knee, and the user

may not get adequate support from the backrest. You need to try and match the seat depth of the chair and the ideal seat depth for the user as most standard manual chairs do not offer the option of different seat depths.

### **Backrest Height**

Most standard manual wheelchairs have fixed backrest heights. The level of padding will normally vary with the price of the wheelchair. Most standard chairs have a small degree of recline usually around 5 degrees. This can vary from chair to chair and if you are after more of a recline, it is worth comparing makes and models.

It is possible to get adjustable angle back rests, but these are normally only available on more specialist chairs which cost considerably more. You can buy optional headrests which can be fitted to any wheelchair. This supports the head and gives a chance to rest the muscles supporting the head if they get fatigued.

### **Armrest Height**

The armrests should support your arms comfortably. If they are too high, this will cause your shoulders to hunch; if they are too low then you can end up leaning to one side. When a wheelchair cushion is used, this will raise up the seat base and hence lower the height of most standard wheelchair arms. Normally only the more specialist chairs have height adjustable arm rests.



# Accessories

Accessories which can be added to wheelchairs are available. Examples are:

## Cushions

The basic purpose of a wheelchair cushion is to provide additional comfort to the user when seated.

The more advanced pressure care cushions are designed to prevent pressure sores. These can develop if you spend long periods of time seated in the chair. They can be made from a variety of materials and are rated according to the protection they provide to patients developing pressure sores.

The basic foam cushions are suitable for those at low risk. Medium risk users should look for a cushion which uses a memory foam or foam and gel combination. High risk users should go for either a gel or air based cushion. This is a very basic introduction to the types of cushions available and if you think you may be in the medium or high risk categories you should consult your therapist, GP or local wheelchair services.

## Walking Stick Holder

These are very handy if you use a non-folding walking stick and need to have it available at the end of your journey. They usually comprise a cup at the bottom of the frame for the ferrule with a clip further up to hold the stick in place.

## Weather Protection

There is a number of different type of garments for protecting the user and the chair against wet and or cold weather.

## Storage Bags

These can be used for carrying your personal effects whilst in the chair and can be big enough to carry some shopping too. There are various types to choose from:

- A rucksack type with side loops which attach to the pushing handles at the back of the chair.
- An under seat bag which attaches to the seat of the wheelchair with the opening between the occupant's legs.
- Pannier style bag which attaches to the arm and is positioned inside the chair.

