

Basic handling of manual wheelchairs

Moving a wheelchair requires actions such as reaching, pushing, pulling, lifting, bending, and exerting forces when in awkward postures. Therefore care is required when assisting people in wheelchairs, and moving wheelchairs in and out of cars.

Things to consider for safer handling of wheelchairs:

The wheelchair:

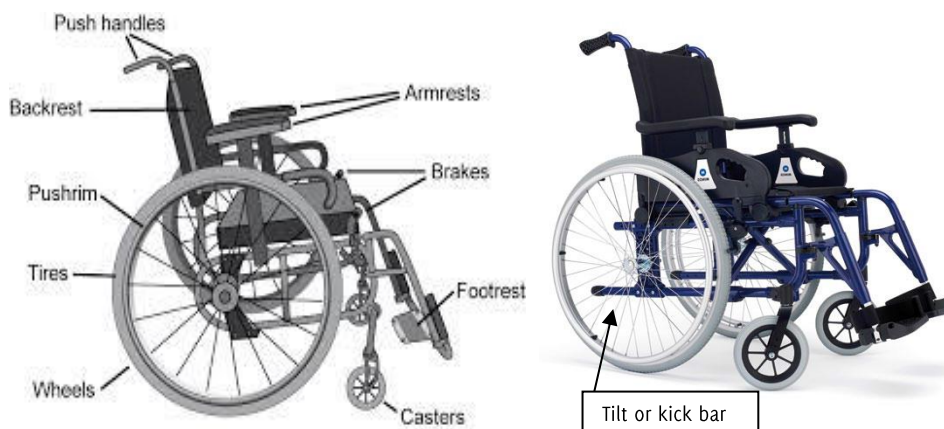
- Is it suitable for the user and the environment?
- Is it maintained regularly and kept in good working order (tyres are inflated, brakes are working, casters are free of hair, frame is not loose)?
- Modern frames can be lighter in weight.

The environment:

- Do not push the wheelchair on soft underlay, or deep pile carpet and rugs.
- Do not push the wheelchair on sand, gravel, rocks or steep terrain.
- Avoid areas where there is insufficient space to move the wheelchair (e.g. cluttered or small rooms).
- Do not push a person in a wheelchair over long distances.

Other:

- The weight of the user.
- The safe load capacity of the wheelchair.
- Your physical abilities and endurance.
- Request documentation and procedures to follow, written by appropriately trained staff, in relation to the wheelchair, safe transfer methods (of the wheelchair and the user), and the environment of intended use.



- Keeping the wheelchair maintained – refer to ILC Tas information sheet **Maintaining your wheelchair and cushion**

Pushing someone in a wheelchair

Wheelchair safety for the wheelchair user

To safely assist someone sitting in the wheelchair instruct them to:

- Sit well back in the wheelchair.
- When standing up or sitting down **always** apply the brakes. If the brakes are too difficult to lock completely, then purchase brake extensions or use a piece of PVC pipe for a lever. If the brakes are not holding strongly have them repaired.
- When standing up or sitting down always lift the footplates up. Ideally, move the footplates to the side or remove them completely as they can be a trip hazard if they are simply folded up.
- Do **not** stand on the footplates as the wheelchair will tip forward.
- Keep the arm rests securely in place and in the correct position.
- Ensure that feet are secure on the footplates and will not slip off. Ensure that hands, arms and fingers will not be injured or become entangled in wheel-spokes.
- Keep the weight of the body forward when propelling the wheelchair up a slope.
- Travel slowly and safely down slopes, in order to maintain control of the wheelchair.
- People with poor trunk control should wear a safety belt and sometimes a harness as well. When these are present, but not being worn, ensure that they don't get caught in the wheels.
- Keep the wheelchair clean, and well maintained.
- **If a hill, ramp or kerb seems too steep, DO NOT attempt to push a person up or down it.**

To tilt a wheelchair back

- Always warn the occupant of your intention.
- Use the tilt bar located on the wheelchair, pushing down on it with your foot. At the same time pull back and down on the handgrips.
- Only lift the front caster wheels a small distance off the ground until the wheelchair feels balanced, i.e. is not tending to immediately tip forward again or fall back.



To assist a person in a wheelchair up a kerb

- Face the front of the wheelchair to the kerb, tip the wheelchair onto its back wheels, place the castors onto the pavement and then push the wheelchair up onto the pavement.
- Only attempt a single small kerb, no more than a 100mm (4 inches), and only if you feel you can keep control of the wheelchair and the person.
- If the wheelchair has anti-tip wheels, these may need to be adjusted or swiveled out of the way temporarily.

To assist a person in a wheelchair down a kerb

- Reverse the wheelchair to the edge of the kerb. Slowly roll the rear wheels down from the kerb and onto the road. When the castors are at the edge of the kerb, tilt the wheelchair backwards and carefully pull the wheelchair backwards.
- When the occupant's feet are clear of the kerb, lower the castors to the road.
- Only attempt a single small kerb, no more than a 100mm (4 inches), and only if you feel you can keep control of the wheelchair and the person.
- If the wheelchair has anti-tip wheels, these may need to be adjusted or swiveled out of the way temporarily.

To push a wheelchair downhill

- Travel slowly down slopes in order to maintain control of the wheelchair.
- If the gradient is very steep it may be advisable to go down backwards to prevent the person in the wheelchair from tipping out. Please consider carefully whether it is safe to do so.

To push a wheelchair uphill

- Keep the weight of your body forward when pushing the wheelchair up a slope.
- Keep your back straight and your elbows slightly bent.
- Most of your effort should be coming from your legs, not from your arms and back.

To fold a wheelchair

- Remove cushions from the seat.
- Remove all other items if required to save space or to reduce weight, e.g. footplates and wheels.
- If handles are provided at each side of the seat, use these to pull upwards. Otherwise, fold the wheelchair by holding the midpoint of the seat at the front and back, then pulling upwards.



- If the seat or backrest is solid then these will need to be removed from the wheelchair frame. If they cannot be removed the seat will not be able to be folded. These should be easily unclipped if designed for removal from the wheelchair for transportation. If the wheelchair has a headrest, remove this as well.

To unfold a wheelchair

- Replace wheels if they have been removed.
- Push down on both sides of the seat making sure you keep your fingers clear of the edges of the seat frame in case they get trapped.
- Re-attach other removable components.

Lifting a wheelchair into a car boot

- If manual lifting is the only option, get advice from a health professional about safe lifting techniques. Before lifting anything, check that you can lift the weight safely and that the wheelchair will fit into the boot.
- The following can assist you to lift the wheelchair more easily:
 1. Clear the boot of other items.
 2. Seeking the assistance of another person is the best option.
 3. Remove footplates and wheels (if possible) and place them into the boot. This reduces the weight and length of the wheelchair. Any other removable items should also be considered.
 4. Fold the wheelchair (as per steps listed above) and engage the brakes.
 5. Take a step back from the boot. With your feet slightly apart for balance, bend your knees, maintain the natural curves of your spine and lean the wheelchair frame towards you.
 6. Grasp the fixed section of the wheelchair frame front and back.
 7. Keep the load as close to your body as possible and pull/slide the wheelchair up onto your thighs.
 8. The wheelchair can be rested on the lip of the boot before sliding it in. Remember to use your leg muscles, not your back.
 9. Protect the axles of detachable wheels and avoid damaging the wheelchair when closing the boot.

Lifting aids/alternatives:

- Boot sliding aids can assist in loading the wheelchair in and out of the car.



- Use of a towbar-mounted wheelchair carrier or powered boot hoist helps to reduce lifting.



- Investigate whether a wheelchair can be borrowed or hired instead of transporting a wheelchair. Shopping centres and other services often have wheelchairs available for use.

Further advice

- Refer to the wheelchair **User Manual** for more information about wheelchair maintenance. Store the User Manual in a safe place for future reference.

Contact ILC Tas for more information



Ring **1300 885 886** to speak to a health professional



Visit our website www.ilctas.asn.au or email us at ilc@ilctas.asn.au



Make an appointment to visit our centre at 275 Wellington Street, South Launceston



Ring us to find out when we will be visiting your area

ILC Tas is a not-for-profit organisation and does not sell equipment.

Supported by the Crown through the Department of Health and Human Services and the Australian Government Department of Health. Although funding for this service has been provided by the Australian Government, the material contained herein does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Australian Government.