

# Travelling in a wheelchair in a vehicle



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## Information for prescribers

### Wheelchair prescription and transport

The safest method of travel is to transfer into a vehicle seat and wear an occupant restraint (lap/sash seatbelt), or for children under 8 years of age, to sit in an Australian Standards Approved (ASA) child car seat as required by law.

When a wheelchair is prescribed to meet a person's mobility, functional and postural needs, it is also important to consider the transport needs of the person using the wheelchair. However, wheelchairs that best suit a person's mobility needs may not be suitable to use by an occupant in a vehicle.

When a decision has been made that transport in a wheelchair is the option of 'less risk' the following should be considered:

- The wheelchair frame **does not** require transit options in place in order to be safely secured in a vehicle. However, if a wheelchair has transit options attached, these **must** be used during transport.
- When there are no transit options available, then the frame (**not** the removable / detachable parts i.e. wheels, footplates, armrests) **must** be used to secure the wheelchair. Manufacturers will generally indicate / mark on the wheelchair frame where the tie downs are to be attached in these situations.
- Wearing an occupant restraint (lap/sash seatbelt) when travelling in a wheelchair is required by law. A lap/sash seatbelt is different to a pelvic belt, which is a postural support device. Pelvic belts and harnesses should be prescribed where required for postural support and are not required for travel.
- Trays and other equipment, mounted on the wheelchair, are to be removed for travel and secured safely in the vehicle.





## When is a wheelchair suitable for use in transport?

**Always** refer to the manufacturer's guidelines for information about the safe use of an occupied wheelchair in transport.

The following wheelchairs would not meet **minimum** practice standards for safe transport i.e. those with:

- low backs
- single pole seats
- insufficient base / frame to attach tie downs (when there are no transit options available)
- no headrest.

It is important to remember that crash testing:

- may not always be indicative of whether a wheelchair will withstand the forces of an impact
- occurs under specific conditions or set-up, i.e. speed of the vehicle, weight of the person, accessories of the wheelchair, and may not match the individual's circumstances.

## Wheelchairs for use in vehicles

**Always** adhere to best practice and refer to the relevant Australian/New Zealand Standards (AS/NZS) when working with people who need to travel in a wheelchair in a vehicle. It is recommended to use wheelchairs that meet AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 for transportation, where possible.

- The wheelchair has dimensions suited to the use of standardised wheelchair occupant restraint assemblies (**AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section 6.3.2**)
- The wheelchair has a high backrest or head support securely fastened to wheelchair uprights or fitted firmly into backrest tubing, with any metal crossbar effectively padded (**AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section 4.2.3 & ZA2**)
- Wheelchair hard trays are removed during vehicular transport and stored securely in the vehicle (**AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section ZA6**)  
**NB:** Fire / flame retardant foam trays if secured to the wheelchair, are permissible.
- Special seating (such as wooden inserts or moulded thermoplastics) are fastened securely to the wheelchair frame (**AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 Section ZA2**).

## Further information

- *Transport Safety Guidelines for People with Disability* (2010) currently in revision on 'Basic Requirements for Wheelchairs Safe for Transportation in Vehicles' available at [http://spotond.org.au/?page\\_id=17](http://spotond.org.au/?page_id=17)
- The Independent Living Centre (ILC) at [www.ilc.asn.au](http://www.ilc.asn.au) for specific resources.
- The Australian Standards relevant to the transportation of people seated in wheelchairs can be purchased from: <http://infostore.saiglobal.com/store>
  - AS/NZS 3696.19:2009 (Wheeled mobility devices for use as seats in vehicles)
  - AS/NZS ISO 16840.4:2014 (Seating Systems for use in motor vehicles)
  - AS/NZS 10542.1:2009 (Wheelchair tie down and occupant restraint systems – requirements and test methods for all systems)
  - AS/NZS 10542.2:2009 (Wheelchair tie down and occupant restraint systems - four point, strap type tie down systems).