

Wheelchair and Scooter Use and Access in Canada: Prevalence and Policy

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Introduction: Wheelchairs and scooters provide opportunities for social participation and improved quality of life for individuals with mobility limitations. Policies which govern funding and other related aspects of wheeled mobility device provision substantially impact the ability of individuals to obtain appropriate devices for their needs.

Objective: To establish prevalence and demographic factors associated with wheeled mobility device use in Canada, and to relate these policies which impact wheeled mobility device provision and funding.

Method: We conducted an analysis of the Canadian Survey on Disability (2012) to determine prevalence and demographic factors associated with wheelchair and mobility scooter use. Subsequently, we conducted national and provincial analysis of policies related to wheelchair funding and provision, guided by the Disability Lens (Canadian Disability Policy Alliance).

Results: Approximately 288 800 individuals in Canada (1% of the community-dwelling population; 60% female) use a wheelchair or scooter for all or part of their daily mobility. Use increases with age, with the highest prevalence over the age of 75 (4.2%). Policies governing provision and funding vary by province. Access to wheelchairs and scooters for individuals over age 65 or in residential care may be constrained by funding guidelines. Funding typically covers basic mobility, and may not support the technology required for full participation.

Conclusion: A wide range of Canadians require wheeled mobility devices for all or part of their daily mobility. Despite rising prevalence with age, funding policies may constrain access for those who need it most, or may not provide sufficient access to promote full participation.