

You and your Power Wheelchair Information Book

A guide to registration, insurance,
maintenance and repair and other useful
tips for power wheelchair users



Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) You and your Power Wheelchair Information Book - A guide to registration, insurance, maintenance and repair and other useful tips for power wheelchair users

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For more information contact:

Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme, Metro South Health, Queensland Health, PO Box 281, Cannon Hill QLD 4170, email MASS184@health.qld.gov.au, phone (07) 3136 3636.

An electronic version of this document is available at health.qld.gov.au/mass

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Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) You and your Power Wheelchair Information Book

A guide to registration, insurance, maintenance and repair and other useful tips for power wheelchair users
June 2022

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Details of My Power Wheelchair

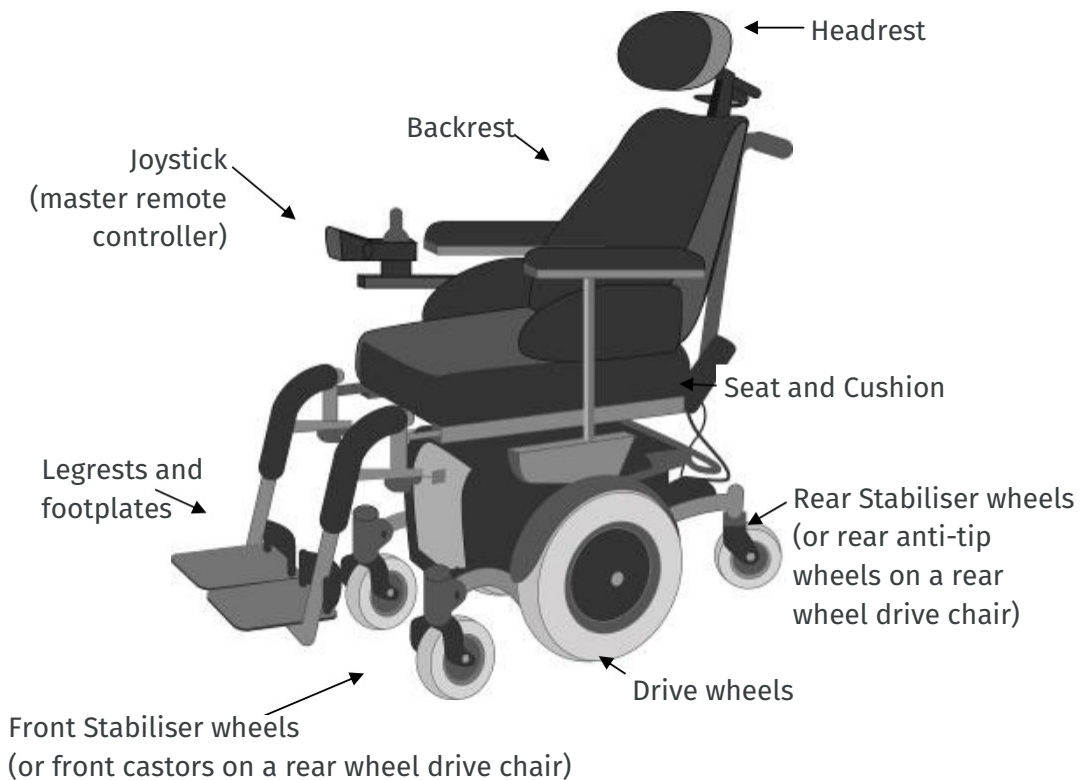
Date chair supplied	
Brand and model	
MASS Plaque Number	
Additional equipment on my chair	

MASS Service and Repairs

Phone: 07 3136 3524

Email: MASS-Repairs@health.qld.gov.au

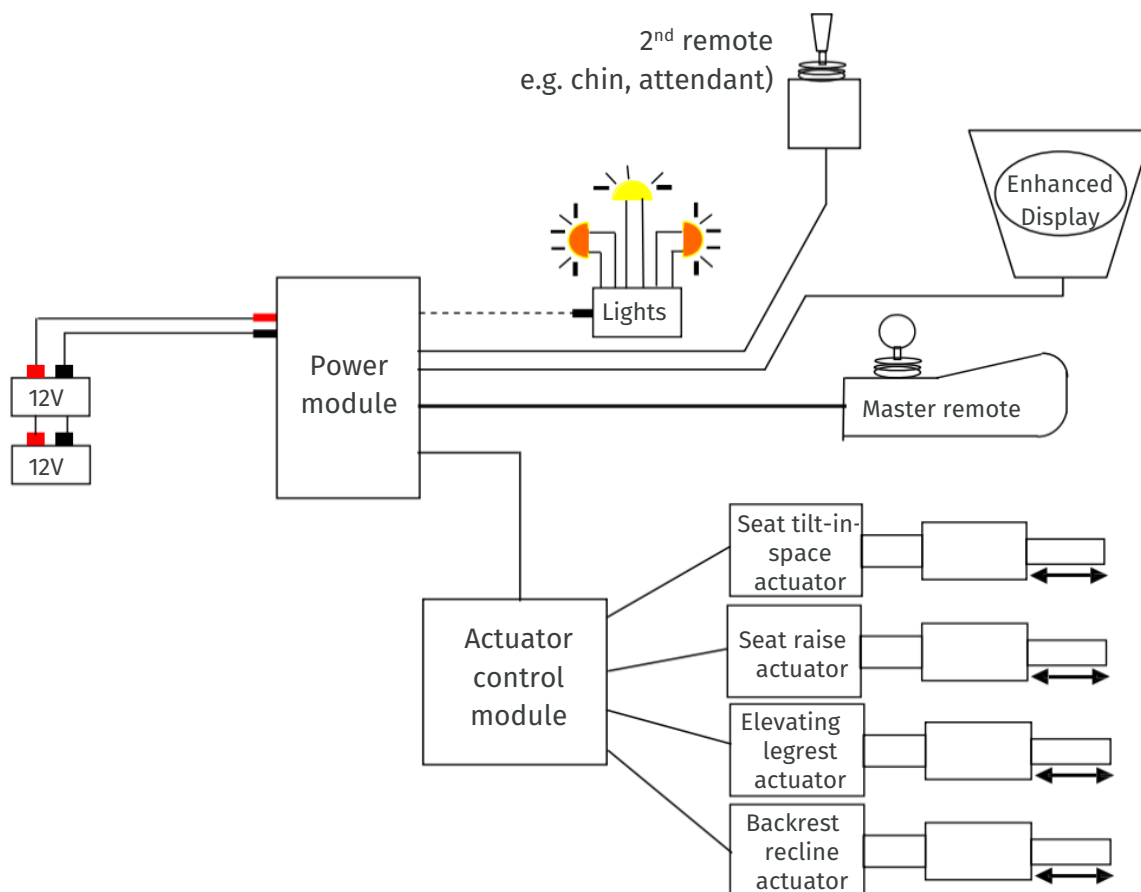
Figure 1: Example of Mid-Wheel Drive Power Wheelchair



Electric Components

- **Batteries:** The power source for the chair. Available in sizes from 20amp hour up to 75amp hour
- **Controller:** Includes the joystick or other user control interface, such as chin control, sip-puff control, scanner or other specialty control. This is the brains behind the power wheelchair to control direction, speed, seating and other functions as required.
- **Power Module:** Translates commands from the user control into power (as drawn from the batteries). Power is sent to motors to drive and turn the power wheelchair, or the actuators to tilt the seat (or other seat functions if fitted), or sends power to accessory devices such as lighting or environment control units.
- **Non-expandable Controls:** These are simpler controllers with a maximum of 50-60amp power output, more common on light to moderate duty power wheelchairs. There are limits to how many accessories can be fitted to an integral controller – more than 1 seat actuator and many specialty controls cannot be fitted.
- **Expandable Controls:** This is where the user control and power module are separate. Remote controls send higher power output to motors 70-110amps, can accept any user control (chin, foot, sip-puff, scanner etc); run several powered seating functions and a range of accessory devices including environment control units, computer mouse mover and other device controllers.

Figure 2: Example of expandable control



Delivery and Adjustments

Power wheelchairs are often delivered to your home by the supplier. In rural or remote areas it may come by freight, in a box and needing some assembly. The supplier representative should be available to consult with you and your therapist to set up the power wheelchair to suit your needs. If the supplier cannot deliver to you it is important to link up with a local support person (e.g. technical or trade staff at local hospital or health centre) and have the contact details of the supplier handy in case any instruction is needed when setting up the chair.

Check the following components are adjusted and suited to your individual needs:

- **Footrest(s)** are low enough so your thigh is making firm contact with the seat for at least the first 2/3 of your thigh. Check for even pressure from the front of buttocks to the area just behind the knee. The footrest(s) is too low if the feet are not making contact with footrests.
- **Legrest hanger** is not at risk of causing pressure injuries along the side of the lower legs – contact your therapist or supplier for padding or legrest modifications if any red areas or discomfort occur.
- **Joystick / Controller** is within easy reach, shoulder relaxed. The controller and armrest pad can often both be moved to suit.
- **Backrest** angle and height set to support your upper body in a position you can maintain while driving the power wheelchair and at rest. Some users will drive the power wheelchair down forward slopes or over rough ground with the seat tilted slightly (if powered seat tilt is fitted) or “hook” their non-driving arm over the push handle at top of backrest (only on some makes of wheelchairs) or use a chest strap to keep their upper body stable.
- **Cushion** has top surface facing up, and front is facing forwards – important as some people do not have the skin sensation to know if the cushion is the right way around. The cushion will not prevent pressure areas and may actually cause pressure injuries if used incorrectly.
- **Seat belt** set to keep your pelvis at the back of the seat. You should adjust the back angle, cushion and seat belt at the same time to find the best sitting position, as discussed with your therapist.
- **Headrest** set for correct alignment of the head over the spine.
- **Lateral supports and other positioning devices or straps** (e.g. pommel between knees, hip and thigh pads, ankle or foot straps) should be adjusted to provide stability and comfort when sitting in the power wheelchair.
- **Special devices** (e.g. chin/head/sip-puff operated controls, environment control, electronic communication aid, computer mouse mover, etc) are installed and set up for your planned use. You will most likely have a plan with your prescribing therapist for further training or support to acquire greater skill and expand on your use of such devices.

Warranty and use within design limitations

At the time of delivery, it is important to establish: Is the warranty period for 1 or more years?

If repairs are required during the warranty period, contact MASS. A client service officer will check the purchase date to see if the item is still covered by warranty, then contact the initial supplier. If it is deemed that the repair is not warranty, the supplier will report back to MASS and quote for the work to be done. If the repair is covered by warranty, then it shall be the initial supplier's responsibility to repair or replace the item as required.

N.B. MASS will replace **tyres** during the warranty period as they are not usually covered by warranty.

Contact MASS Repairs on phone 3136 3524

It is important to get to know the **limits of your power wheelchair design**. Check with the supplier and/or your prescribing therapist for guidance about:

- Maximum slopes (uphill, downhill, side slopes) you can drive the power wheelchair over and how to prevent it from tipping over or falling out of the seat.
- Conditions the power wheelchair was designed for? What are the do's and don'ts, or precautions for you in your power wheelchair, such as:
- Outdoor use: Get to know the power wheelchair's limits on uneven ground when others are around to help out if the chair becomes stuck or bogged.
- How do I cover the controls if I have to drive in rain? A clear plastic bag should be used.
- Can I drive the power wheelchair through puddles? This is best avoided, particularly when the motors have been working over some distance as the sudden cooling of water splashing on the motors can do significant harm.
- How far the power wheelchair can be driven in one go? This is influenced by battery type and size, user weight and variations in local terrain.
- You should avoid running the power wheelchair at its maximum speed, continuously, over long distances, especially in hot weather. Over long distances aim to run the chair at $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of its maximum speed. Where high speed is desired or for heavier users, high capacity motors, gearboxes and batteries may be required.
- Do not change the wiring looms to batteries or other components.
- Do not place battery chargers on foam or other upholstered seats as the heat generated may cause damage and may be more likely to start a fire. Place battery chargers on a brick or tile or similar non-flammable surface.

Battery Charging

It is important to fully charge the batteries every night; 8 to 12 hours of continuous charge is required to fully charge the batteries.

- **Fully discharging batteries is best avoided** as battery life may be halved by this.
- **Use the correct charger** for the battery type or the battery may not charge fully. Chargers for power wheelchairs are 6amps or above such as 8amp chargers. 0.5amp and other small amp chargers are designed for smaller batteries such as hoist batteries.
- **Unplug the charger during electrical storms** – the batteries and entire power wheelchair electronics may be damaged by power surges.
- **If the charger or controls get very hot** during charging the plug may not be connected fully.

Do the batteries have a memory?

No, but they will deliver a reduced running capacity/distance if they are not charged fully.

Charging batteries for 8-12 hrs will fully charge the batteries to 100% capacity. However, if the batteries are only charged for 4-6 hrs, they will only charge to around 75% of full capacity. If this limited charging time continues, the next time they will be charged to only 75% of the last charge. This will in real terms only give you around 50% of the capacity of fully charged batteries. Over time you get a very short time of use, short running distance.

Warranty and Battery Replacement

Your supplier may expect the batteries to last through the warranty period and may decline to replace them if they believe incorrect charging has occurred.

MASS will replace batteries when required with the type recommended for the specific power wheelchair.

Registration and Road Rules

The box below provides details of registration of powered wheelchairs from the Queensland Government Transport and Motoring, Registration website qld.gov.au/transport/registration/register/wheelchair/index.html

Register a motorised wheelchair

If you use a motorised wheelchair on a footpath or road area in Queensland, it must be registered. To be registered, your motorised wheelchair must:

- have an electric motor
- be designed and built for a person with mobility difficulties
- have a tare weight of 150kg or less
- not be capable of travelling at more than 10km/h on level ground.

If you move from another state or territory to Queensland to live you must register your motorised wheelchair within 14 days. Visitors to Queensland are exempt from registration. In all cases, the person in control of the motorised wheelchair must be capable to safely operate the motorised wheelchair.

If the registered operator is an individual, the person using the motorised wheelchair must:

- hold a certificate, statement or letter from either a medical practitioner, a registered occupational therapist or registered physiotherapist confirming that due to a physical or medical condition, their mobility is severely impaired and requires the use of a motorised wheelchair for assisted travel
- be capable of operating the motorised wheelchair.

Organisations registering motorised wheelchairs

Examples of organisations include nursing homes, shopping centres, educational institutions or hire companies.

Motorised wheelchair users must provide the organisation with a certificate, statement or letter from either a medical practitioner, a registered occupational therapist or a registered physiotherapist confirming that due to a physical or medical condition, their mobility is severely impaired they require the use of a motorised wheelchair for assisted travel.

How to register a motorised wheelchair

To register a motorised wheelchair, you will need to visit a [transport and motoring customer service centre](#) or, if you live in a rural area, a [QGAP office](#), [Magistrates Court](#) or local [police station](#) that provides vehicle registration services—call to confirm before visiting.

To apply, you will need to bring:

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- a completed [vehicle details form \(F3529\)](#)
- a completed [motorised wheelchair statement \(F4414\)](#)
- [evidence of the Queensland address](#) where the wheelchair will be garaged—this could be your Queensland driver licence, property rates notice, or a gas, phone or electricity bill. Must be a Queensland address
- [evidence of identity](#)—such as your adult proof of age card, [photo identification card](#) or Queensland driver licence.

If you are registering a motorised wheelchair in the name of an organisation (examples of organisations include nursing homes, shopping centres, educational institutions or hire companies) you will also need to bring identification of the organisation, such as a:

- Certificate of Incorporation issued by the Office of Fair Trading
- business registration issued by the Australian Securities Investments Commission
- Certificate of Registration of a Company issued by the Australian Securities Investments Commission.

You must also provide proof that you are acting on behalf of the organisation, such as:

- wearing the organisation's uniform
- a business card or business identification
- documentation from the organisation on official letterhead.

As a registered business is not a legal entity, you must also provide identification for the legal entity behind the business.

Read more information about [evidence of identity requirements for organisations \(F4362\)](#). Please note: medical certificates are no longer a requirement for getting your motorised wheelchair registered.

Fees and charges

Registrations of motorised wheelchairs are free.

There are also no transfer, number plate or compulsory third party (CTP) insurance fees.

After a motorised wheelchair is registered

When you register a motorised wheelchair you will receive:

- a [number plate](#)
- a registration certificate
- an information sheet explaining Queensland Road Rules relating to motorised wheelchairs.

Registration labels are no longer issued to motorised wheelchairs.

Motorised wheelchair use

When using a motorised wheelchair outside of the home, for example on a footpath, the person using the motorised wheelchair is considered to be a pedestrian under the Queensland Road Rules. This means a motorised wheelchair (including mobility scooters) can only be used where a pedestrian can travel, referred to as pedestrian travel routes.

A person using a motorised wheelchair, or any other pedestrian must:

- use the footpath or nature strip where available: if there is no footpath or nature strip available, or there is an obstruction that needs to be avoided, the person must travel as close as possible to the left or right hand side of the road—you also should face oncoming traffic if possible
- cross a road by the most direct route and use a crossing where available.

In addition to the above general rules, a person using a motorised wheelchair must also exercise due care and attention for the safety of others at all times, including travelling at an appropriate speed (which depending on the situation may be less than the maximum speed of 10km/h).

You can permit another person to use your motorised wheelchair. If you do, you must make them aware of the Queensland Road Rules relating to the use of a motorised wheelchair.

Last updated: 1 April 2019 - qld.gov.au/transport/registration/register/wheelchair

Insurance

When the power wheelchair is registered with the Department of Transport and Main Roads the user receives compulsory third party insurance free of charge. This provides cover for personal injuries that arise when the driver of the vehicle (i.e. the power wheelchair user) is at fault.

Damage to property (the power wheelchair or others' property), fire, theft or other damages can be insured through major insurers or an insurance broker, usually for a low charge. Insurance may be possible as part of an existing home and contents insurance policy, however it is important to list the power wheelchair as a specified item, clearly stating its value when arranging your insurance. Other insurers may offer specific policies for your power wheelchair. One insurance company specialises in providing insurance exclusively for power wheelchairs and mobility scooters (i.e. Blue Badge Insurance). MASS does not endorse any one particular insurer. It is recommended that you shop around for the insurance cover that suits you best and/or enquire with an insurance broker.

Safety and Support for Changing Needs

Your power wheelchair was prescribed to best meet your needs at the time of making an application for funding. The following may have been set up for you:

- Position of the controller
- Joystick handle shape
- Joystick sensitivity and drive program (acceleration, turning speed, stopping speed)

Figure 3: Example controls with different joystick handles, switches, levers, dials and buttons.



Your power wheelchair is your main means of mobility and very important to allow you some independence and mobility. Your condition may change over time, as can your personal circumstances (e.g. the carer you were working with) or the areas where you use the chair may change. You need to be safe and to be mindful of the safety of those around you. Some things that can change include:

- You have trouble holding and moving the joystick
- Your carer changes and this makes it difficult to charge the chair, or arrange service and repairs.
- You have more fatigue when driving longer distances or at certain times of day.
- You move to a different area; need to travel longer distances or over different terrain.
- Your seating is too basic, or not secure – you need more support to sit well.

For these and numerous other reasons it can be important to reconsider how well your power wheelchair is meeting your needs. You may need to:

- Contact MASS to arrange service or repairs.
- Make clear arrangements with carers about charging and routine maintenance of your chair.
- Contact your prescriber to review your controls, seating or consider a different wheelchair.
- Think of alternative routes which could be shorter, safer, have more shade or protection from hot or wet weather.

Tyres and Spares

RACQ roadside assistance service (Phone: 13 11 11) provides a free flat tyre repair service to power wheelchair users who do not have any other assistance to get moving again and have a spare tube with them. There can be significant delays if the punctured tube cannot be repaired, so it is best to **carry spare tubes for front and rear tyres at all times** when using the power wheelchair.

MASS will fund a spare tube for any power wheelchair tyres at your next service with a repair agent organised by MASS. Please make the service person aware that MASS will fund tubes only to be supplied to the driver of the power wheelchair or his/her carer to keep for the next time they have a punctured tyre. Most service agents doing regular repairs will be aware of this, however if your service agent has further questions about supply of tubes, ask them to call MASS on phone 3136 3524 or email MASS-Equipment@health.qld.gov.au

Having a **spare tyre and tube** can be helpful in the event of large holes or gashes in the wall of the tyre, when the tyre and tube must be replaced.

Having a **spare rim with tyre and tube** fitted is even faster – the wheel can be removed and exchanged with your spare. However, some power wheelchairs will require specialist tools to remove the wheel and care must be taken to ensure the rim is correctly aligned with the drive axle. These tasks require mechanical skill and should be carried out by experienced service personnel.

Other Spares and Supplies to consider carrying with you:

- Puncture repair kit for repair of punctured tubes, available from bike shops.
- Small backpack or money/waist bag for spares and/or valuables.
- Clear plastic bag to cover controls and poncho for use in wet weather.

General Maintenance – Basic Maintenance Tasks

MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT needs cleaning, maintenance of pump up tyres, lubrication and tightening parts that have worked loose to prevent breakdowns and to help the equipment last longer.

Pump Up Tyres need regular checks to keep inflated to the correct pressure (as shown on the side wall of the tyre) and at times need puncture repairs. A small domestic electric compressor with pressure gauge is most useful for power wheelchairs, although a hand pump with a tall plunger type of cylinder will be capable of generating enough pressure to inflate most tyres.



Clean all areas, especially areas where sweat, urine or food may have spilled or become caught up. Wash with mild soapy water or disinfectant, but not strong detergents – important oils and greases can be washed away by detergents getting into bearings and other closed mechanical parts. Wipe down upholstery, vinyl armrests and headrests where the oils from the skin can corrode the vinyl.



Clear away hair or other matter from castor and wheel axles. Often the castor/wheel, axle and bearings must be removed to clear all material – do not attempt this without prior experience; instead contact MASS to arrange for service.



Use lubricant and protectant products on all frame metals, zinc treated bolts (silver or light golden colour) and other fasteners to prevent rust.

Spray lubricants that penetrate and protect a variety of metals and will not harm paint, plastics or upholstery (e.g. Inox, Lanotec both based on Lanolin) or adhesive spray on lubricants (e.g. CRC Tac 2) are most suitable. These can be purchased from retail outlets that sell automotive lubricants.

For bearings, spray the lubricant directly into the bearing housing while rotating the castor or wheel. Alternately, **use sewing machine or bike chain oils** sold in small containers so drops of lubricant can be applied exactly where needed.

Avoid using silicone sprays or thin oil based lubricants (e.g. WD40, regular CRC) unless directed to by the manufacturer. Silicone sprays can 'gum up', while oil and grease can be washed away by thin oil based lubricants getting into bearings or closed mechanical parts.



Tighten nuts, bolts and other fasteners that have worked loose. As a general rule tighten the nut until firm, then turn a further 1/4 to 1/2 turn.

Some bolts are deliberately left a little loose, Bolt through the hand/park brakes – must be loose enough for the brake to push to lock; tight enough so the brake does not wobble

Some bolts should be fastened very tight:

- Bolts to keep footrests in alignment. Angle adjustable footrests can easily be knocked out of alignment by collisions if they are not secured very tight
- Headrest mounts need to be tight as there can be a lot of leverage force on them



ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT needs regular charging and checks to be made to ensure moisture does not enter electrics. Careful handling is important to prevent faults.

Charge batteries fully

- Avoid running the batteries completely flat – the working life of a lead acid battery can be halved by fully discharging the battery.
- Lead acid batteries should be charged even when they are not being used – charge unused batteries at least once a month.
- Use the correct charger. Avoid placing battery chargers on surfaces which can ignite.
- Place chargers on a brick, tile or other non-flammable surface.
- Charge 8-12hrs daily. Do NOT charge for less than 4hrs – drive distance is reduced by undercharging.

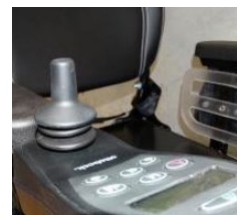


Inspect the keypad and flexible “boot” cover under the joystick knob and keypad for any cracks or holes. Also check that buttons are intact, not showing splits or cracks.

Sweat from the hands, or moisture from high humidity and rain can enter electric components and causing the control to malfunction or stop working.

Handle electronic plugs and connections with care

When removing charger cords, pull the plug, not the cable. Wiggling the plug can loosen the contact pins causing a faulty connection and charging. An accessory “plug pull” handle can be fitted to most plugs to increase your grip/pulling power if necessary. 5



Maintenance Checklist – Powerdrive Wheelchairs (PWC)

Item	Task and Instructions	Date Checked / Comments		
Batteries	<p>Use the correct charger. Charge 8-12hrs daily. Do NOT charge for less than 4hrs – drive distance is reduced by undercharging.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first 1hr of charging is used to prepare the batteries to accept charge. • The next 3-4hrs is the main charging period. • If the charger indicator light goes off after a few hours, this is NOT a sign that batteries are at full charge. • From 4-12hours the charger provides trickle charge to take batteries up to their full capacity. • Higher capacity batteries (e.g. 55amp hour) generally need longer charge times. • If the charger or controls get very hot during charging the plug may not be connected fully. <p>Unplug the charger during electrical storms.</p> <p>If the batteries have been recharged each day for a continuous 8-12 hour period, and the lights on the wheelchair control indicate the batteries are still not fully charged, then the batteries may not be holding charge. Contact MASS to arrange for service.</p>			
Controls	<p>Check flexible ‘boot’ between joystick and control module, and all buttons on the keypad for wear or cracks. If there are cracks or holes immediately arrange repair by contacting MASS. If not repaired the power wheelchair may soon malfunction or stop working as moisture from hands damages circuits.</p>			

Item	Task and Instructions	Date Checked / Comments		
Cables and Connections	<p>Check that cables and plug-in connections are secure and not worn.</p> <p>If cables are frayed, showing through insulated cable housing, or plugs are showing bare wire, immediately arrange repair by contacting MASS.</p> <p>If not repaired there is a risk of malfunction, power failure, battery damage or fire.</p>			
Tyres (Pump Up/ Pneumatic)	<p>Check pressure and inflate to _____psi (complete for pump up tyres)</p> <p>Recommended pressure is printed on the sidewall of the tyre.</p> <p>A small domestic compressor or foot pump is most suitable.</p> <p>Air hoses at service stations should be used with caution.</p> <p>Tyres can burst or distort in shape if over inflated.</p> <p>Check tread. Inspect for flat spots and wear.</p> <p>Contact MASS to arrange for replacement of tyres as required.</p>			
Castors and Drive Wheels	<p>Inspect axles. Remove hair, lint and dirt.</p> <p>Castors turn and pivot freely.</p> <p>Drive wheels run smooth, driving even both sides; no noises or squeaks.</p> <p>Check for excessive wobbling or binding when driving, or that the chair does not pull to one side.</p> <p>Contact MASS to arrange for service as needed.</p>			

Item	Task and Instructions	Date Checked / Comments		
Freewheel Mechanism	Disengage the drive mechanism using the freewheeling device (hubs or lever operated). The chair should be able to be pushed manually. (Your power wheelchair supplier can advise how to operate freewheel)			
Park Brakes	Disengage the drive mechanism using the freewheeling device as described above. Apply the park brakes. The drive wheels should be locked and chair will not roll.			
Frame	Clean entire frame. Use a damp cloth and mild detergent or disinfectant. Do NOT use bleach. Take care not to get water inside the frame. Dry chair thoroughly using a towel, especially around the screws to prevent rust.			
	Polish chrome plated parts. Use a commercially available polish or metal protectant spray. Follow instructions provided.			
	Check wheelchair frame for rust and cracks. If you find any significant rust or cracks, contact MASS.			
Nuts and bolts	Check all nuts and bolts are in place and correctly tightened. If nuts and bolts are missing, contact MASS to arrange for a repair. Your power wheelchair supplier or local repair agent can provide advice on how much to tighten various nuts and bolts.			
Armrests	Check that armrests can be easily removed, swung-away and adjusted (if they are designed to do this). Armrests can seize up if they are not moved regularly.			

Item	Task and Instructions	Date Checked / Comments		
Footplates or Footboard	<p>Check position of footplates.</p> <p>Speak with your prescriber about the correct positioning of your footplates. Footplates should be high enough that the soles of the feet are taking weight but not removing weight from the thighs. The thighs should be taking weight for almost their full length.</p>			
	<p>Check action of swing-away, fold up or removal mechanism.</p> <p>Footplates can seize up if they are not moved regularly.</p>			
Headrest and Posture Supports	<p>If fitted, check that headrests and other posture support components are secure and adjusted for the user.</p> <p>Clean oils from hair off vinyl headrests to prolong lifespan.</p> <p>If mountings are very loose or damaged, contact MASS to arrange repair.</p>			
Upholstery	<p>Clean. Use a damp cloth and mild detergent or disinfectant. Do NOT use bleach. Dry with a towel.</p>			
	<p>Check all areas including armrests and headrests for cracks or other signs of damage and wear.</p> <p>Contact MASS for repairs as required.</p>			
	<p>Nourish vinyl. Use a commercial upholstery restorer or general purpose protectant spray.</p>			
	<p>Consider applying fabric protector to upholstered seats, backrests, or headrest to keep clean and make future cleaning easier.</p> <p>Use a commercially available fabric protector.</p>			

The text below are extracts from the [MASS General Guidelines](#) and [Application Guidelines for Mobility Aids](#).

Repairs and Maintenance for Equipment on Permanent Loan

MASS will subsidise repairs and maintenance to its MASS plaqued permanent loan aids, associated with reasonable wear and tear and use within the home environment and reasonable community access.

If an aid requires repairs and maintenance these should be undertaken as soon as possible to prevent further damage and safety issues occurring.

Contacting MASS

- Contact should be made with the local MASS service centre - 07 3136 3524
- The person needs to provide the plaque number and a brief description of the repairs and maintenance required.
- MASS and repair and maintenance suppliers will refuse to accept unclean aids.

Back up manual wheelchairs

Provided, as is, from MASS stock as an emergency means of mobility within the home when an applicant's power wheelchair is being serviced or repaired. A waiting period may apply until a suitable MWC is available. MASS will not fund accessories or modifications to back up MWCs.