Inpatient Equipment Policy

People who have sustained a spinal cord injury generally require some equipment to enable them to live as independently as possible in the community.

Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre aims to ensure that all patients undergoing a rehabilitation program are provided with basic equipment required to enable discharge home.

Type of Equipment

The type of equipment required will depend on your level of disability. Items may include a wheelchair (manual or motorised), a wheelchair cushion, a shower chair and other items such as continence aids (leg bags, catheters etc). Staff will consult with you and your family (where applicable) to decide on what equipment best suits your needs.

Equipment Funding

Equipment required by patients who are not eligible for compensation is usually provided by Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre on a long-term loan basis. Equipment may be issued from available stock or ordered specifically, depending on individual circumstances. Where applicable, external agencies such as Domiciliary Care or Disability SA may be approached to provide needed equipment.
Patients eligible for compensation are provided with equipment necessary for discharge. Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre then seeks reimbursement for equipment costs through the relevant insuring body.

**Maintenance and Repairs Following Discharge**

All equipment funded through Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre remains the property of the centre but is available for the patient to use for as long as it is required. You will be provided with information regarding care, use and maintenance of your equipment as part of your rehabilitation program. It is considered your responsibility to ensure that equipment is well-maintained and to seek advice from staff of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Unit if problems with equipment occur. If your equipment requires major repairs/maintenance following discharge, staff from the department which was responsible for providing the item can assist you.

**Home Modifications**

Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre does not fund modifications to patients’ homes (e.g. ramps, rails). As a general rule, arranging and funding of home modifications is your responsibility. Staff will provide advice and endeavour to source funding through community agencies or insuring bodies.

**Continence Supplies**

On discharge, you will be provided enough supplies for 1 month. Towards your discharge, nursing staff will discuss the Continence Aids Payment Scheme (CAPS) with you. This scheme is funded through Medicare and will provide some funding for any
continence supplies you may require. Please note that there may be a significant shortfall between the cost of continence equipment and CAPS funding.

**Wheelchairs**

It is hoped that you will be able to use the information in this chapter to help you understand how the Occupational Therapists (OT) will help you decide on the best seating equipment for you. It is also hoped that you can use this chapter as a resource if you have any postural or equipment issues after you leave Hampstead Centre.

**On Your Admission**

You would most likely have been set up in a wheelchair by the occupational therapist. This wheelchair would have come from our ward stock and would meet your basic initial requirements. If you are requiring a wheelchair for discharge then your OT will help you to choose a wheelchair that best meets your needs.

The OT will involve you in this process by asking you about your wheelchair needs-where you might go and what you might do in it. They would also consider your postural needs, portability, your upper limb ability, endurance, transfer technique, home, school or work environment, and size.
Seating and Posture

Optimising your posture in the wheelchair is a major focus of wheelchair prescription.

Correct sitting posture is important to maximise your function and comfort, minimise the chances of skin breakdown, and to avoid discomfort and deformity.

Some common postural problems include:

**Leaning:** can be caused by a number of problems but generally it is caused by incorrect positioning of your pelvis. Leaning usually occurs when the hips are not level - with people most often finding they lean towards the lower of their two hips. If your hips are not level, it may cause back problems (e.g., scoliosis) or pressure problems across your bottom.

![Hips in level position](image1)

![Hips leaning one way](image2)

**Slumped Posture:** this is typically caused by not having your bottom all the way back in the chair or very saggy upholstery. When in a slumped posture, you may find it hard to breathe or hard to reach forward in the chair.
**Knee Position:** the position of your knees can tell you a lot about your posture. Your knees should be aligned to ensure that your hips are not rotated. They should be at the same height to ensure even pressure distribution under your bottom and legs. You must also avoid letting your knees splay outwards.

**Feet Position:** your feet should be pointing straight ahead. If your feet are turned in or out, or you find that one foot or both feet are falling off their footplate, this can be the result of poor hip position. Poor positioning of your feet can lead to pressure problems on your feet or legs and longer term postural problems.
Solutions to common postural problems: it is important that you leave the unit knowing how to check for these signs and how to manage them. Often solutions relate to:

1) Upholstery needing retensioning;
2) Cushion needing review or replacement;
3) The “set up” of the wheelchair, that is the wheelchair angles, backrest heights and footplate positioning, may need changing;

Consequences of Poor Posture

Correct sitting posture is very important to maintain your function and minimize the chances of unwanted problems, such as skin breakdown, from occurring.

You will generally know when your posture is not correct. The signs of something being wrong are that you find it harder to do activities which were not a problem before, such as propelling the wheelchair or even problems with eating. If this occurs you should check the following factors to fix the problem and therefore your posture.
Reduced Function

Poor posture will limit your ability to engage in day to day activities. Your ability to reach, manipulate and position yourself will be reduced. You may find it harder to perform tasks that you could previously manage. It may also be more difficult to propel or control your wheelchair.

Skin Breakdown

Incorrect posture will often result in uneven pressure being distributed through your body where it contacts through the seat. If left unattended, this can result in skin breakdown which can then lead to significant medical problems which require bed rest and, in extreme cases, surgery.

Deformity

Deformity can result from long term postural problems which have not been addressed. Ligaments and muscles stretch or contract when the joints are held in an abnormal position for a period of time. If this is prolonged, your posture may become fixed in this position. This may lead to reduced function, skin breakdown and pain/discomfort.

Other Difficulties

May include reduced breathing, digestion and bladder/bowel issues as a result of long term postural problems.
In Conclusion

During your admission your occupational therapist will consult with you about the features of your wheelchair and seating system that you require. The aim is to prescribe something that meets your postural and mobility needs as well as fit in with you and your lifestyle. There are many features to consider and your therapist will help you in choosing the best selection of the items relevant to your needs. This not only occurs whilst you are an inpatient but also when you have been discharged (if you require assistance with your seating).

You may find it useful to refer (or refer your carers) to the sections on adjustments and how to correct postural problems. Please remember that modifications to your equipment and seating should be done in consultation with an OT. If you have any questions regarding your seating, do not hesitate to contact the Occupational Therapy Department on 8222 1684.