



Joint position paper on the provision of mobility devices in less resourced settings

JOINT POSITION PAPER ON THE PROVISION OF MOBILITY DEVICES IN LESS-RESOURCED SETTINGS

**A step towards implementation of the Convention on
the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) related
to personal mobility**



WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Joint position paper on the provision of mobility devices in less-resourced settings: a step towards implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) related to personal mobility.

1.Disabled persons - rehabilitation. 2.Self-help devices - utilization. 3.Orthopedic equipment. 4.Human rights. 5.Developing countries. I.World Health Organization. II. United States. Agency for International Development.

ISBN 978 92 4 150288 7

(NLM classification: WB 320)

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Financial support: US Agency for International Development

Cover photos (clockwise, left to right): 1, 3 and 4 – Chapal Khasnabis/WHO; 2 – Graziella Leite Piccolo/CICR

Design and layout by Inís Communication – www.iniscommunication.com

Printed in Malta

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1. Introduction

Mobility devices enable persons with disabilities to achieve personal mobility, and access to these devices is a precondition for achieving equal opportunities, enjoying human rights and living in dignity (UN, 1993). The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) highlights the responsibility of States to take effective measures to ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities, and a corresponding responsibility to promote and ensure availability and access to mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies (UN, 2006). (See Box 1.)

Furthermore, the *United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 1993) and World Health Assembly resolution WHA58.23, "Disability, including prevention, management and rehabilitation" (WHO, 2005a), also urge countries to facilitate access to appropriate assistive technology and to promote its development and other means that encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities in society.

Recent publications, such as *Community-based rehabilitation: CBR guidelines* (WHO, 2010a), *Guidelines on the provision of manual wheelchairs in less-resourced settings* (WHO, 2008a), *Prosthetics and orthotics project and programme guides* (Landmine Survivors Network, 2006a and 2006b), and *Guidelines for training personnel in developing countries for prosthetics and orthotics services* (WHO, 2005b) provide practical recommendations and support for countries in the area of assistive technology.

Despite the efforts of stakeholders at the international, national, regional and local levels, the mobility needs of people with disabilities are not being met. This joint position paper was developed in response to a meeting about personal mobility and mobility devices, held on 28–29 October 2009 at World Health Organization headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland. This paper aims to guide and support countries, especially those with limited resources, in the implementation of relevant articles of the CRPD associated with the provision of mobility devices.



Annette Wong/WCPT

2. What are mobility devices?

Mobility devices are one of the most common types of assistive technologies or devices. Assistive technology can be defined as “any piece of equipment, or product, whether it is acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities” (WHO, 2011). Mobility devices are designed to facilitate or enhance a user’s personal mobility – this relates to their ability to change and maintain body position and walk and move from one place to another (WHO, 2001). Common examples include crutches, walking frames, wheeled walkers, wheelchairs (manual and powered), tricycles, scooters, orthoses such as callipers, braces and splints, and prostheses such as artificial legs. Devices such as white canes are also considered mobility devices, as they assist people with visual impairments to move independently within their homes and communities.

3. What are the benefits of mobility devices?

Mobility devices are appropriate for people who experience mobility difficulties as a result of a broad range of health conditions and impairments, including amputation, arthritis, cerebral palsy, poliomyelitis, muscular dystrophy, spinal-cord injury, spina bifida, stroke and visual impairment. They are also relevant for older people who experience mobility difficulties. Studies have shown that assistive technologies, when appropriate to the user and the user’s environment, have a significant impact on the level of independence and

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