There are many types of powered (electric) wheelchairs on the market.

Powered Wheelchairs come in different sizes for children and adults and will have standard features and / or the ability to be customised to suit individual needs.

Powered wheelchairs are useful for people who have difficulty or are unable to self-propel a manual wheelchair. They are not for everyone so when considering a powered wheelchair, it is advisable to:

- Seek assistance from a health professional such as an Occupational Therapist or a Physiotherapist.
- Trial the wheelchair in the different environments that is intended to be used.

The selection of a powered wheelchair requires careful consideration of a number of factors including:

- User physical skills to control the wheelchair.
- Users size and build.
- User postural support needs.
- User cognitive, perceptual and visual skills.
- Environments in which it will be used.
- Carer’s needs.
- Transport needs.

Assessment of these areas will determine the required size of the wheelchair, whether a basic or specialised wheelchair is needed and what options and accessories are appropriate.

These common terms are used to describe standard features of powered wheelchairs:

**Rigid** - for increased strength and driving efficiency

**Folding** - for transport or storage (if the user or carer is able to lift the heaviest part)

**Rear Wheel Drive** - large drive wheels at the rear with smaller front wheels for improved grip and power on uneven or slippery ground.

**Mid Wheel Drive** - large drive wheels in the middle with smaller front and rear wheels for turning in tight spaces. Can also be suitable for uneven ground

**Front Wheel Drive** - Large front wheels with small rear wheels for improved kerb climbing.

**Four Small Wheels** - small front and rear wheels are best for indoor use only.
Guide to Selecting Powered Wheelchairs

The Independent Living Centre provides an impartial information and advisory service to help you choose the right product for you

The environment and user will determine which option is more suitable.

**Free Wheel**: Allows the chair to be pushed manual by disengaging the motor via adjustable hubs or levers.

**Seat and Backrest**: These can be made from slung nylon, vinyl or other upholstery. Other seats can be padded and contoured like a car seat.

A specialised cushion can be placed on the solid seat base. Specialised backrests and headrests can be attached to some wheelchairs.

**Footrests**: Are often height adjustable, swing-away and removable, or a single lift up footplate. Other options, such as elevating leg rests may be available.

**Armrests**: They can be full length or desk-style (for getting closer to a table), and are often removable or swing away and height adjustable. Other options may be available.

**Controls**: Programmable, non-programmable and specialised joystick controls are available depending on the wheelchair model.

**Specialised Features**

Some wheelchairs offer more specialised and customisable features to meet individual needs. These include specialised seating and power functions such as seat tilt, recline and elevation

**Accessories**

Accessories can further customise the wheelchair to the needs of the user. Most powered wheelchairs can be fitted with a range of accessories including: trays, carry bags and holders (e.g. crutch, oxygen cylinder or drink holders)

**Batteries and Chargers**

The wheelchair is usually powered by one or two rechargeable batteries that are sealed, lead, acid or gel. Most wheelchairs have a separate charger. It is recommended that the chair be put on charge every night to maintain condition of the batteries.

**Range of Travel**

How far the wheelchair will travel is dependent on many factors including the type, age and condition of wheelchair and batteries, the combined weight of the wheelchair and user as well as the terrain on which it is used.

Depending on these factors a wheelchair can travel from about 14km to over 40km on full charge. They are not legally allowed to exceed a speed of 10 km/hr.
**Guide to Selecting Powered Wheelchairs**

**Transport**

Depending on the vehicle, powered wheelchairs can be transported either externally on carriers, or within the vehicle.

External carriers are generally tow ball mounted or trailer style and must comply with Department of Transport guidelines. To carry a powered wheelchair within a vehicle a wheelchair lifter, platform hoist or ramp is required. If the user is to remain in the wheelchair, the vehicle must be correctly fitted with approved wheelchair and occupant restraint systems.

Before purchasing a powered wheelchair with a folding frame, the carers need to be confident that they can disassemble and reassemble the chair independently and can lift the heaviest individual part safely.

**Licensing**

A powered wheelchair user does not require a licence. The user is considered a pedestrian and as such is limited to a maximum of 10km/hr and must follow applicable road rules.

**Further information:**

**ILC Head Office:**
The Niche Suite A 11 Aberdare Road Nedlands WA 6009
Fax: 08 9381 0611  Email: general@ilc.com.au
Enquiry line: 9381 0600  www.ilc.com.au