



CONSUMER GUIDE

TO PURCHASING WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT





The National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) is a non-profit trade association dedicated to expanding opportunities for people with disabilities to drive or be transported in vehicles modified with mobility equipment. Comprised of nearly 500 individuals and organizations representing mobility dealers, manufacturers, driver rehabilitation specialists, allied health professionals, and industry stakeholders, NMEDA members work together to ensure quality, safety, and reliability through the Quality Assurance Program (QAP)™. For drivers and passengers with disabilities, working with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer ensures technical expertise and a commitment to accessible

NMEDA.org

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OVERVIEW

For a driver or passenger with mobility challenges, having a safe and reliable method of transportation can make going about your day more comfortable while eliminating stress. If you, or a loved one, live with a disability, choosing the right type of vehicle and adaptive equipment to be your main source of accessible transportation can help ensure you're safe and confident while on the road. Because of the impact this can have on your day-to-day life, it's extremely important to make an educated purchasing decision.

The process begins with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), who manufacture stock vehicles that will later be converted into wheelchair accessible vehicles also known as WAVs. A vehicle conversion manufacturer then receives the vehicle and may perform substantial structural and mechanical alterations, such as lowering the floor and installing a wheelchair ramp, etc. Once completed, the converted vehicle is shipped to a Quality Assurance Program (QAP)[™] accredited dealer to install additional adaptive equipment depending on the needs of the consumer.

Working with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer ensures your mobility needs are fully met by experienced, knowledgeable industry professionals upholding the highest quality standards in every vehicle conversion and installation.

This guide, along with the help of your local QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer, will provide you with the tools to make the buying process safe, seamless and professional.

When searching for an adaptive mobility specialist, NMEDA membership should serve as your stamp of approval because all QAP-accredited NMEDA dealers offer:

- Individualized, in-person evaluations
- Custom vehicle modifications
- Specialized education and training in adaptive technology and innovation
- 24-hour emergency roadside services nationwide



HOW TO BUY

Purchasing a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) is a big decision. If you have a mobility challenge and need accessible transportation, it's difficult to know where to start when it comes to finding, purchasing, and learning about your new or used vehicle. These next steps will help you get on the road to independence:



one Contact a NMEDA QAP dealer.

Whether you are a driver or a passenger with a disability, a consultation with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer should be your first step in the buying process. A QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer can provide in-depth knowledge of the different types of equipment available, will recommend the best vehicles for the equipment you need, help you locate a Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS) for an evaluation, and provide you with financing options. Unlike an automotive dealer, their emphasis is on mobility equipment and WAVs —matching the right solution with the right person. Visit NMEDA's dealer locator tool at www.nmeda.org/dealerlocator to find a QAP mobility dealer near you.

two If you are a driver with a disability, set up an evaluation appointment with a Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS).

During your evaluation, a CDRS will assess your strength, coordination, vision, perception, and cognitive skills, as well as conduct an actual driving performance assessment. These assessments will help determine your ability to drive with specific adaptive equipment. Upon successful completion of the driver rehab program, you will be provided with a written prescription for vehicle modifications. If you want to explore the possibility of getting behind the wheel of an adaptive vehicle, visit the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED), www.aded.net, to find a CDRS near you.

three Do your homework.

Here are some additional steps you may want to discuss with your mobility dealer and/or CDRS:

Consider your needs – What are the dimensions and features of your wheelchair? Will you be driving the vehicle independently or are you looking for a vehicle in which you will be the passenger? Do you want a transfer seat, or will you be driving while in your wheelchair? Each of these questions must be evaluated before you can determine what type of modifications would best fit your needs.

Establish a budget – How much can you afford to pay? Remember to consider a down payment, monthly payments, insurance, gas and an estimate for yearly maintenance. Your budget will play a large role in deciding whether to buy a new or used vehicle, or whether to adapt your current vehicle. Rebates, grants, loans and other financial aids are available and should be taken advantage of. See page 15 for more information on funding.

Evaluate your lifestyle and daily routine – How much parking space is available at home for a ramp or lift to deploy? How often do you leave your home? What are your most visited destinations and is accessible parking available? Is there more than one user of a mobility device in your household? These answers will help you determine the type of vehicle and equipment that will be best suited for your lifestyle, such as a minivan, SUV, truck, car, ramp, lift, etc.

Insist on QAP – Not all mobility equipment dealers and manufacturers follow a structured quality assurance program or are audited by a reputable third party. You can easily confirm the QAP status of a dealer with our dealer locator tool, and NMEDA's list of Safety-Reviewed Vehicles will show which vehicle conversions have been reviewed and accepted by NMEDA Compliance Review Program requirements.



four Make your purchase.

After your initial consultation, you may decide to purchase your WAV directly from a QAP dealer. If you decide to buy a vehicle from a traditional automotive dealer and then have it adapted with mobility equipment from a NMEDA dealer, keep in mind the recommended vehicle guidelines set by your NMEDA dealer during your original consultation. Be sure to test-drive the vehicle or one that is similar before you make a purchase.

five Obtain training.

Once purchased, you may need additional education and training to become familiar with the modified vehicle, the adaptive equipment, and vehicle controls, as well as learn about general vehicle safety and service information. Your QAP dealer will review this and more. If adaptive driving equipment is used to operate the vehicle, you should receive training from a CDRS.

six Get reimbursed.

When available, submit your Mobility Assistance Reimbursement Application to the appropriate vehicle manufacturer. The step-by-step process may differ from company to company, so it's best to visit the website for your particular vehicle manufacturer and download the correct forms before your purchase.



VEHICLES

From minivans and full-size vans to pickup trucks, sedans, SUVs, low-speed vehicles, and even motorcycles, there are many options available when choosing an adaptive vehicle suited for your needs. You can easily confirm the QAP status of a dealer with our dealer locator tool, and NMEDA's list of Safety-Reviewed Vehicles will show which vehicle conversions have been reviewed and accepted by NMEDA Compliance Review Program requirements. Your QAP dealer can help you identify the right vehicle for you. However, it is also important to consider the following:

Minivans typically offer greater universal applications for individuals using mobility devices, maximizing interior space, and permitting quick transfers in and out of the vehicle. There are various minivan manufacturers, models, and configurations available.

Side-entry vehicles allow a person seated in a wheelchair to be the primary driver, allow the ramp to be deployed at different curb heights, and allow a passenger riding in a wheelchair to select their preferred seating location within the vehicle.

Rear-entry vehicles are more commonly used when caregivers or family members are the primary driver, or when parking space is limited.

Different ramp styles - powered, manual, in-floor, and fold-out - are available. Your QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer can help you identify which style of ramp is most suitable based on your needs and lifestyle.

Full-size vans are more spacious and have more payload capacity. They are recommended for larger families, for multiple passengers using wheelchairs, or for an individual using a large power wheelchair that cannot fit in a traditional minivan.

Trucks and specialty vehicles are available for those who prefer a more unique mode of transportation. Typically, power lifts will hoist and store wheelchairs in the bed of the truck from either the side door or tailgate. Low speed vehicles that can operate up to 25 miles per hour are a great choice for in-town drivers. Specialty vehicles such as motorcycles are also available for modification.

EQUIPMENT

Working with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer, you will be able to explore a wide range of adaptive equipment to find the solutions that will help you be as independent as possible. You can find manufacturers of adaptive driving equipment at nmeda.org/industry directory. Below is an overview of common adaptive equipment options:



Hand Controls

For drivers with limited or complete loss of lower extremity function, hand controls may compensate for decreased range of motion, impaired sensation, and/or loss of strength. Hand controls may be mechanical or electronic.

Push/pull controls must be pushed to brake and pulled to accelerate.

Push/right angle controls require the user to push the control forward to brake and down toward the thigh for acceleration.

Push/twist controls must be pushed to brake and the handle must be twisted to accelerate.

Push/rock controls must be pushed forward to brake and rock the top of the handle back to accelerate.

EQUIPMENT (continued)

Steering Modifications

There are many types of mechanical devices and electronic system modifications available to assist the driver in steering the vehicle.

Steering devices are designed for drivers who must steer with one hand. They come in a variety of configurations including a spinner knob, tri-pin, palm grip, amputee ring, u-grip, v-grip or even a customized device.

Steering column extensions bring the steering wheel up to 6" closer to a driver who may use a wheelchair, thus providing extra legroom and compensating for reduced range of motion.

Deep-dish steering wheels are aftermarket steering wheels with a rim that is closer to the driver.

Foot steering controls transfer the steering control from the driver's hands to their feet, and may require the vehicle's auxiliary and secondary controls to be adapted as well.

Horizontal steering columns are customized for those who experience limited arm strength and range of motion, and for those who cannot use a conventional steering wheel.

Reduced-effort steering reduces the amount of effort required to steer the vehicle. The amount of reduction

is determined through an evaluation process.

Joystick control systems use a single upright post to control steering as well as vehicle acceleration and braking. These are designed for people with good strength and coordination in one hand, and limited use of their other extremities.



EQUIPMENT (continued)

Seating & Securement Systems

There are a variety of seating and securement solutions available for both drivers and passengers. Adaptive seating focuses on properly positioning an individual to either drive or ride in a vehicle from the seat of the car, whereas securement systems are designed to lock the individual and their mobility device in a safe and secure position on the interior floor of the vehicle.

Wheelchair securement systems: Manual tie downs typically require caregiver assistance in order to ensure proper securement and safety. Retractable tie downs also require caregiver assistance. Once applied, they automatically tighten and reduce the slack in the strap. Automatic wheelchair docking systems are designed for a person to secure their wheelchair without the assistance of others. Special brackets are installed on the wheelchair and on the floor of the vehicle.

Adaptive seating: An interior transfer seat is a seat base that an original vehicle seat is installed upon. The transfer seat base is motorized and has controls that allow the user to move the seat backwards and then swivel the seat towards the center of the vehicle's interior. An exterior transfer seat is fully power operated and rotates out, over the driver side door sill or passenger door sill, and lowers for ease of transfer.



EQUIPMENT (continued)

Mobility Device Carriers

There are a number of devices available to safely and securely transport your manual wheelchair, power wheelchair, or mobility scooter. The specific device you choose will depend on the combination of vehicle, weight capacity, hitch class, mobility device, and your physical capabilities.

Unoccupied Platform Lifts allow users to drive their mobility device onto the platform of the lift; secure their mobility device with the included manual or automatic retractable tie-downs; and activate the power lifting option with the included hand pendant.

Hitch-Mounted Lifts are unoccupied mobility device carriers that are secured to the rear of the vehicle.

Hoist Lifts hook onto a mobility device and hoist it into the cargo area of the vehicle. The best type of hoist lift for you will depend on your vehicle type, since different versions are available for trucks, SUVs, and vans.

Occupied Platform lifts allow users to drive their mobility device onto the platform of the lift, secure their mobility device with the included manual or automatic retractable tie-downs, and activate the power lifting option with the included hand pendant.

Pull-Behind Carriers are attached to the hitch of the vehicle, and may be an option when towing capacity is a concern.



Auto mobility industry jargon can be confusing, but NMEDA is here to help! Our nationwide network of QAP-accredited NMEDA dealers ensures your access to experienced, knowledgeable professionals who will guide you through the purchasing process and accurately answer your questions. Here are a few terms to familiarize yourself with once you are ready to explore your transportation options:

NMEDA - The National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association. NMEDA is the premier North American non-profit association proudly representing the auto mobility industry.

Quality Assurance Program/QAP™ - NMEDA's method for setting and constantly raising the auto mobility industry's standards of safety, quality, and reliability through structured processes, rules, guidelines, and third-party audits. It is the only recognized quality assurance program for the auto mobility industry in North America.

WAV - An abbreviation for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle.

Adaptive - Something that has been changed or modified to suit a new or different purpose. If a vehicle is adapted for wheelchair use, that means the floor may have been lowered, a lift or ramp was installed, the doors were widened, etc.

Conversion - The process whereby an OEM assembly line vehicle is made accessible and drivable for people with disabilities. Once a conversion company structurally modifies the vehicle to include accessibility features, it is considered a "converted vehicle."

Kneeling - A vehicle's ability to lower itself closer to the ground, or "kneel," greatly simplifies a wheelchair user's ingress and egress.



SAFETY FIRST

All NMEDA dealers are required to maintain Quality Assurance Program accreditation, ensuring the entire QAP dealer network meets or exceeds customer needs and current government safety requirements. This commitment to safety is maintained by expertly trained professionals who provide everything from in-person evaluations and reliable guidance, to superior auto mobility solutions and outcomes.

FUNDING

Purchasing a WAV can be expensive, but your QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer will help guide you to special funding and financing programs. Here are some options to consider:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – Both service-connected and non-service connected veterans may qualify for financial assistance from VA's Auto Grant and/or Adaptive Equipment allowance. Your local QAP dealer can assist with eligibility determination and help you navigate VA's application process.

State/Provincial Agencies – Every U.S. state has a Vocational Rehabilitation Agency that is designed to help residents with disabilities obtain and/or maintain employment. Funding varies by location, but most agencies provide financial assistance for vehicles and/or vehicle modifications, and NMEDA's QAP dealer network can help clarify what agency funding is available in your state or province.

Social Security Administration – The Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS) Program is a work incentive provision within the SSA's disability benefits program that allows approved individuals to set aside income and/or resources to pay for goods and services (including transportation) needed to achieve an occupational goal.

Manufacturer Rebates – Several OEMs (Ford, GM, Honda, Toyota, etc.) offer mobility rebates to purchasers of new vehicles. Before purchasing a new vehicle for conversion or modification, visit the NMEDA website or ask your local QAP dealer about current rebates.

Special Financing – Our dealer members offer a variety of financing options including loans with extended terms, leasing packages, and more. Contact a QAP dealer directly to determine the special financing options available to you.

Grants – Several non-profit and other organizations can provide information, support, and resources to individuals with specific diagnoses (e.g., the National Multiple Sclerosis Society may be helpful for those living with MS whereas United Cerebral Palsy would be more appropriate for someone living with CP). NMEDA's website provides additional information about our partner organizations and can help you connect with a local chapter.

Fundraising – Turn your search for a mobility solution into an outlet for creativity and connection. Consider engaging charitable, religious, and other organizations or media outlets to supplement your fundraising efforts.





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