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## IN THIS ISSUE

- United Way Campaign
- Leanne Taylor Wins Bronze
- Vehicle Modification Options
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- Telehealth in Manitoba
- Power Assist Device Options
- Indigenous Reconciliation
- Canada Disability Benefit Update



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**ON THE COVER:** The new Empulse R90 add-on, rear-mount power assist device for manual wheelchairs, from Sunrise Medical. See article starting on page 21.

### **CORRECTION NOTICE**

In the summer 2024 issue of ParaTracks, the article "Rural Living and Home Care Services" (p.11-12) suggested provincial home care services, including self and family-managed care, were only available through the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA). However, these services are indeed available through all five regional health authorities (RHAs). For details about home care services in Manitoba and how to contact your RHA, please visit:

[www.gov.mb.ca/health/homecare](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/homecare)

We sincerely apologize for this error.

*Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba acknowledges that our work extends throughout the province of Manitoba on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Anishininewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, and Nehethowuk Nations, the ancestral lands of the Inuit, and the homeland of the Red River Métis. Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba is committed to creating an organizational and service delivery framework that respects and honours the rights of Indigenous Peoples living with spinal cord injury, and to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in the spirit of truth, reconciliation, and collaboration.*

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**MPF** MANITOBA  
PARAPLEGIA  
FOUNDATION INC.



**United Way**  
Winnipeg

# WELCOME TO SCI MANITOBA

My name is Becky Norman and I joined Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba in June 2024 as a Rehabilitation Counsellor. I have an Applied Counselling Certificate through the University of Manitoba and a Volunteer Management Certificate through Volunteer Manitoba. I enjoy and am passionate about supporting and advocating for others.

I am the founder and director of Manitoba Mutts Dog Rescue Inc., which is a charity in Manitoba. This has given me a lot of experience in working with different volunteers and members of the community and in supporting people with varying experiences. I worked in retail management for many years before that.

Most of my experience comes from being a mother of five beautiful differently abled children whom I have had to advocate for through many health systems. It has given me lots of understanding into the human body and the

resilience of people as they go through traumatic health events. My daughter is Indigenous and that has given me experience in advocating and understanding barriers due to intergenerational trauma.



I feel very honored to be able to meet so many wonderful people through Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba and to be able to discuss each person's unique individual and family needs. I look forward to many more conversations and to meeting and working with you in the future.

My name is Coleen Junio, and I am excited to join the SCI Manitoba team as a Rehabilitation Counsellor – Transitional Services. I graduated with a Bachelor of Psychology from the University of Manitoba and have gained valuable experience working in employment training and client support roles. My passion for empowering individuals to overcome challenges and achieve personal and professional growth has been shaped by these experiences, and I'm committed to making a positive impact in the lives of the people with whom I work.

In my previous roles, I had the privilege of working closely with individuals from diverse backgrounds, helping them build confidence and develop skills to navigate various life transitions. Whether it was

providing career counselling or offering personalized support, I've always enjoyed creating meaningful connections and fostering a sense of trust with those I serve. I look forward to bringing this same commitment and energy to SCI Manitoba, where I am excited to continue to fostering relationships.





# ANNOUNCEMENTS!!

## NOTICE

### 2024-25 Membership Renewals

In the past, SCI Manitoba has mailed out membership renewal notices in the fall each year, but this year we will be sending out these notices in January and February 2025. In the meantime, please know that your membership will be extended at no cost. Memberships will NOT expire.

*If you have news to share with SCI Manitoba and the readers of ParaTracks, please contact us at [info@scimanitoba.ca](mailto:info@scimanitoba.ca).*



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*SCI Manitoba extends its sympathies to the families of the following loved ones who recently passed away:*

*Lawrence Born  
Jeffrey Chapman  
Jack Dalglish  
William Delorme  
Suzette Dorge*

*John Epp  
Ronald Fehr  
Irene Forest  
Allen Kozma  
Dennis Lerat*

*Jack Moore  
Bradley Ostash  
Scott Pearce  
Thomas Yuill*

# United Way Annual Campaign Kickoff and SCI Manitoba's Wine Raffle



## United Way Winnipeg

United Way Winnipeg's annual Walk This Way fundraiser came to an end on Friday, September 13, 2024, and once again, Winnipeggers rallied for the cause by walking, running, cycling, and rolling more than 150,000 kilometres to unlock an \$80,000 contribution from matching sponsors Assiniboine Credit Union, Birchwood, Johnston Group, Payworks, and Wawanesa Insurance.

This year's Walk This Way Finish Line Party coincided with United Way Winnipeg's annual campaign kickoff event, which featured Virgin Radio Winnipeg's Chrissy Troy and a live performance by Jérémie & The Delicious Hounds.

### WINE RAFFLE FUNDRAISER

As part of each annual United Way Winnipeg campaign, SCI Manitoba organizes a workplace campaign to help raise funds for all the work being done in our community by so many other non-profit groups, and to also show our appreciation for the generous financial support we have received from United Way Winnipeg as an agency partner over the span of several decades. Last year, our **wine raffle** was so popular that we've decided to hold another **wine raffle** this year.

Like last year, raffle tickets are \$5 each or three for \$10. The number of prize baskets

this year will depend on the number of donations received, but there will be one prize basket containing only non-alcoholic wine (last year we had a total of six prize baskets).

We accept cash payments and e-transfers sent to [payments@scimanitoba.ca](mailto:payments@scimanitoba.ca). To purchase tickets, you can contact anyone at SCI Manitoba (see contact details on page 4).

We are in the process of gathering donations for this year's prize baskets, so if you'd like to make a contribution, please get in touch with LéAmber Kensley by phone at 204-786-4753 ext. 231, or email at [lkensley@scimanitoba.ca](mailto:lkensley@scimanitoba.ca).

**The draw will take place at SCI Manitoba's office on Friday, December 13, 2024 at 2 pm.**



SCIM staff at United Way Winnipeg's 2024 Walk This Way Finish Line Party and campaign kickoff event held September 13 at True North Square Plaza.  
L-R: Becky Norman, LéAmber Kensley, Terra Coulter



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# Leanne Taylor Wins Bronze in Paris



*Photo credit: Canadian Paralympic Committee, Dave Holland*

In the last issue of ParaTracks, readers were introduced to Leanne Taylor, an SCI Manitoba member heading to the 2024 Summer Paralympic Games in Paris, France to represent Team Canada in the paratriathlon.

On September 2nd, after the race was delayed one day due to poor water conditions in the Seine River (for the swim portion of the event) and despite not feeling at her best, Leanne started strong and was able to hold her position to finish in third place to capture the bronze medal in her first Paralympic appearance.

On October 2nd, Leanne was honoured and celebrated at the Health Sciences Centre in

Winnipeg, at a meet and greet event organized by Kevin Stewart (PT) and Elisha Watanabe (OT).

CONGRATULATIONS Leanne!!



*SCIM staff congratulate Leanne at meet and greet event at HSC on October 2, 2024. From L to R: Artem Dolia, Alexandria Toews, Coleen Junio, LéAmber Kensley, Gail Burnside, Leanne Taylor, and Terra Coulter.*

# Vehicle Modifications for People with Disabilities: Challenges and Resources

For individuals with disabilities, mobility is crucial for leading an independent and fulfilling life. Whether commuting to work, attending medical appointments, or simply enjoying recreational activities, access to personal transportation can significantly enhance freedom and autonomy. However, for people with physical disabilities, standard vehicles may not meet their needs, requiring specialized modifications. In Canada, vehicle modifications tailored to accommodate various disabilities are available, but these modifications often come with challenges. High costs, limited service availability, and regulatory inconsistencies pose barriers to obtaining necessary vehicle adaptations. This article examines the most common vehicle modifications and the challenges people with disabilities face in securing these essential services.

## Typical Vehicle Modifications for People with Disabilities

Vehicle modifications for people with disabilities are typically customized to address the individual's specific limitations, depending on whether they are the driver or a passenger. These modifications range from simple adaptations like hand controls to complex systems like electronic driving aids. Here is an overview of some of the most common vehicle modifications:

### 1. Hand Controls

Hand controls provide a practical solution for individuals who cannot use their legs to operate the pedals. These adaptations allow drivers to control the gas and brake using their hands rather than feet. There are various types of hand controls, such as:

- **Push/Pull Systems:** Drivers push the lever forward to brake and pull back to accelerate.



- **Electronic Hand Controls:** These systems use electronic actuators to control acceleration and braking, allowing for smooth and precise operation.

Hand controls are a particularly valuable solution for individuals with spinal cord injuries, amputations, or other conditions that limit lower body function. For these individuals, hand controls can be a game-changer, providing the freedom and independence that they might otherwise struggle to achieve.

### 2. Wheelchair Lifts and Ramps

Entering and exiting a vehicle can be a significant challenge for individuals who use wheelchairs. Wheelchair lifts and ramps make this process easier by mechanically lifting the wheelchair into

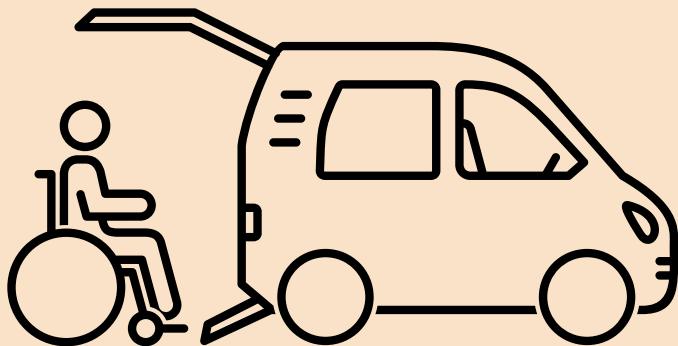
the vehicle or providing a gentle slope for rolling the wheelchair into place. These modifications are commonly installed in minivans, full-size vans, or SUVs.

- **Platform Lifts:** These lifts carry the wheelchair and its user into the vehicle using a hydraulic platform.
- **Folding Ramps:** These are typically used in smaller vehicles. The ramp can fold out from the side or rear of the vehicle to provide easy access.
- **In-floor ramps:** These ramps are designed to slide into the vehicle's floor when not in use, providing a seamless, unobstructed interior. This makes them a popular option for wheelchair-accessible vehicles, particularly minivans or larger SUVs.

### 3. Steering Aids

Drivers with limited arm strength or dexterity often require steering aids to maneuver the vehicle safely. These aids include:

- **Spinner Knobs:** A knob attached to the steering wheel that allows drivers to steer with one hand while using the other hand for other controls, such as operating hand controls for the brakes and gas.
- **Joystick Steering:** For individuals with more severe limitations, joystick steering systems allow drivers to steer, accelerate, and brake using a single joystick control, reducing the need for physical strength.



### 4. Transfer Seats

Transfer seats are a crucial adaptation for wheelchair users who can move out of their wheelchair into the driver's seat but need assistance in doing so. These motorized seats can swivel and move forward or backward, helping individuals transfer from their wheelchair into the vehicle with ease. Transfer seats are also helpful for passengers with mobility issues, providing similar support.

### 5. Lowered Floor Conversions

In vans or SUVs that transport wheelchair users, the floor may need to be lowered to create sufficient space for the wheelchair. This modification provides additional headroom and allows the wheelchair user to move around more comfortably within the vehicle.

### 6. Pedal Modifications

Drivers with limited leg strength or shorter stature may require pedal modifications to operate the vehicle safely. Pedal extenders or pedal relocations can bring the brake and gas pedals closer to the driver's feet, making driving more comfortable and reducing the risk of accidents.

### 7. Electronic Driving Systems

For individuals with severe physical disabilities, fully electronic driving systems offer a comprehensive solution. These systems allow drivers to control various vehicle functions, including steering, acceleration, braking, and even secondary controls like windshield wipers and lights, using touchscreens, joysticks, or voice commands. These systems are highly customizable but often come with significant costs due to their complexity.



## Challenges Faced by People with Disabilities in Vehicle Modifications

Despite the variety of modifications available, people with disabilities face numerous challenges in obtaining and maintaining modified vehicles. These challenges can be broken down into three primary categories: financial barriers, access to service providers, and wait times.

### 1. High Cost of Vehicle Modifications

The cost of vehicle modifications is one of the most significant barriers for people with disabilities. Depending on the complexity of the modification, prices can range from a few thousand dollars for basic hand controls to more than \$50,000 for advanced electronic driving systems and total wheelchair-accessible vehicle conversions. Additionally, licensed professionals must install these modifications, adding to the overall expense. Although some people with

disabilities can get financial assistance, many are forced to cover a substantial portion of the costs out-of-pocket or through private fundraising efforts.

### 2. Limited Availability of Service Providers

Access to qualified vehicle modification service providers is another significant challenge, particularly in rural and remote areas. Most companies that specialize in vehicle adaptations are located in large cities, leaving those in smaller communities with few options. This forces individuals to travel long distances to have their vehicles assessed, modified, or repaired. In some cases, this travel may require staying in urban centers for extended periods, adding to the overall cost and inconvenience.

### 3. Long Wait Times for Modifications

The demand for vehicle modifications far exceeds the available supply of qualified technicians and

service providers. As a result, individuals seeking modifications often face long wait times for consultations, installations, and repairs. These delays can severely impact the individual's independence, especially if they rely on their vehicle for work, medical appointments, or daily activities.

For many Canadians with disabilities, vehicle modifications are not just a convenience - they are a necessity for maintaining independence and improving quality of life. However, the high costs, lack of service providers, and long wait times create significant barriers to obtaining these essential services.

### **Potential Funding Sources**

In Manitoba, there are limited financial resources available to help people with disabilities cover the costs of vehicle modifications. These programs aim to reduce the financial burden of making vehicles accessible for individuals with physical disabilities. Here's an overview of the financial assistance options in Manitoba:

#### **1. Manitoba Public Insurance**

Individuals who were injured in a motor vehicle accident and are unable to operate or access a vehicle may be eligible for funding to cover vehicle modification costs. MPI's Personal Injury Protection Plan (PIPP) may cover the cost of vehicle modifications such as hand controls, lifts, ramps, and other necessary adaptations, and if your injuries meet the definition of a catastrophic injury, PIPP may also provide funds to acquire a passenger car, truck or van that has been adapted for your use, either as a driver or as a passenger. For more information, visit the MPI website at [www.mpi.mb.ca](http://www.mpi.mb.ca).

#### **2. Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba**

If you have sustained a work-related injury and require vehicle modifications as part of your rehabilitation, WCB Manitoba may provide financial assistance.

WCB Manitoba may cover the cost of vehicle modifications such as hand controls, lifts, ramps, and other necessary adaptations. If the modifications are extensive, they may also assist in purchasing a new or used vehicle. For more information, visit the WCB Manitoba website at [www.wcb.mb.ca](http://www.wcb.mb.ca).

#### **3. Veterans Affairs Canada**

For military veterans living in Manitoba, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) offers support for vehicle modifications under its **Veterans Independence Program** and **Disability Benefits Program**.

Veterans who have a disability or injury related to their service may be eligible for funding assistance through VAC, including financial support for vehicle modifications that improve mobility and independence like hand controls, lifts, and ramps. Veterans can apply for assistance through the VAC website at [www.veterans.gc.ca](http://www.veterans.gc.ca), or by contacting their case manager.

#### **5. Income Tax Credits**

The Disability Tax Credit (DTC) is a federal tax benefit that provides relief for individuals with disabilities who face significant expenses. The DTC reduces the amount of income tax payable, and while it does not directly fund vehicle modifications, the financial savings it provides can help offset the costs of vehicle modifications. In addition, individuals who make modifications to their vehicle may also be eligible for tax deductions under the Medical Expense Tax Credit (METC), which includes vehicle modification expenses. You can claim 20% to a limit of \$5,000 of the amount paid for a van that has been previously adapted or is adapted within 6 months after the van was purchased to transport a person who needs to use a wheelchair.

For more information about these and other tax credits, visit the Canada Revenue Agency website at [www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes](http://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes).



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1. Hollister Clinical Study, CLR-00847, 2021 2. Hollister Clinical Study, CLR-00847, 2021 3. Hollister Data on File, TR-00643, 2023 4. European Association of Urology Nurses (EAUN), Evidence-based Guidelines for Best Practice in Urological Health Care – Catheterisation, Urethral Intermittent in Adults Dilatation, urethral intermittent in adults (2013), pages 25, 33, 47  
5. Hollister Data on File, CL-001027 6. Hollister Data on File, CL-001015 7. European Association of Urology Nurses (EAUN), Evidence-based Guidelines for Best Practice in Urological Health Care – Catheterisation, Urethral Intermittent in Adults Dilatation, urethral intermittent in adults (2013), pages 25, 33, 47 8. Hollister Data on file, CL-001017

# New Horizons

## Part Two - Review of the Envo Flex E-Trike

BY: Doug Ingram, SCI Manitoba Member

One year ago, with the financial assistance of the Manitoba Paraplegia Foundation, I took receipt of an electric-assist adult tricycle, or e-trike. In the Fall 2023 edition of ParaTracks, I wrote about the choices facing me and how I went about choosing the best e-trike for me. In this article, I will share my experience as an owner and rider of the e-trike.

First off, if you have experience riding a regular two-wheel bicycle, just throw that out the window because that experience does not carry over to riding an e-trike. In fact, any two-wheel bike experience will actually interfere with riding an e-trike because your trained instincts will not get the intended result. On a two-wheel bike, as the bike leans to one side or the other, the rider has to steer slightly towards the side that the bike is leaning to. Good cyclists will do this subtly, constantly, and without thinking, and it will be invisible to an observer. With the e-trike, if the ground is not level, it will always feel like it is leaning because it is, in fact, leaning, and no amount of steering correction will be enough to overcome this, so the rider has to shift their balance opposite the lean and simultaneously steer in the direction desired.

I definitely had this experience the first time that I got onto my e-trike to ride it! I was on my driveway and I was constantly riding off to the side, onto the lawn and into the trees. I very nearly rode right into the ditch, too. I thought to myself "Oh, no. What have I gotten myself into?". My wife tried it out and didn't like it at all because she too kept riding off course. I did a little research into e-trike riding and I got the advice that I described above. It is very important to take the time to retrain your



*Doug Ingram riding his Envo Flex E-Trike*

riding instincts on a wide open and very flat surface such as a parking lot. This is the same advice that I would offer to everyone who gets an adult e-trike: take the time, in a safe place, to retrain your riding instincts.

So, once I retrained my instincts, I started to really enjoy riding my e-trike regularly around my neighbourhood and on park trails. A real favourite is the Lakeview Trail at Bird's Hill Park. This trail is a 5km paved trail that my wife and I have been savouring the last few years. Previously, I was using my mobility scooter (I use a Smartscoot) and, while it got me out, it is a slow and passive ride. The first time I had the e-trike out on the trail it felt exhilarating! I hadn't felt that free or fast in years.

Since my mobility has decreased markedly over



the last few years, I wanted to engage in any active life choices that I could. The Envo Flex E-Trike allows me to pedal only using the 7 speed gearing choices, any of 5 boost levels applied to the pedalling, or electric drive only up to a maximum speed of 24km/hour. This allows me to exercise my leg muscles and increase my flexibility. I can pedal until I can't pedal anymore, then add the boost or use the motor to get me home.

There are two challenges that I have with the e-trike: mounting and transport. Due to my mobility challenges (C5 fracture in 1979), I have problems lifting my legs high enough to mount the bike easily. Even though it is a step through frame, I would really appreciate if the step through was a bit lower so that I could step through with greater ease.

More significantly, though, the e-trike is big and heavy, which makes it a challenge to transport. The Envo Flex is hinged in front of the pedal cranks so it folds to half its length. However, it's just as heavy when folded, and no longer rigid, so lifting it is awkward. I tried transporting it in a borrowed KIA Sportage and it's doable with two capable people. Since the cargo door threshold is quite high and the ceiling is a little too low, it takes some angle adjustment and care to load fit in the back. It would be simpler with a minivan as the threshold is lower and the door is taller. Also, if the van has middle row seats that fold flat into the floor, it might be possible to fit the e-trike in through the side door without having to fold it. I don't have an SUV or a van so I find it easiest to load the e-trike onto a trailer. I knew going into this experience that transporting the e-trike to use it away from home would be an issue. When I need easy transport and less capacity, I bring my Smartscoot, which weighs 39 lbs total, and I can fold it and put it into the trunk of my car in just one or two minutes.

So, what is the capacity of my e-trike? Well, I can travel over various surfaces very easily! Sand, gravel, or grass are no problem, whereas all of these surfaces would stop my scooter and leave me stranded. I haven't yet had chance to try it in snow but I expect that the e-trike will manage average snow conditions, and we all know how snow can limit our going about! The battery life on the e-trike also far exceeds that of my scooter. What a treat it is to not be constantly worrying about the remaining charge of my battery!

Most of the time I leave the pedal gearing at a mid level, such as gear three, and leave the power boost at the minimum level setting of 1. This allows me to still feel some loading while pedalling but not so much that it exhausts me, and provides the maximum range. A real test of this is the trail at Beaudry Provincial Park. This is a dirt trail and is very rolling, so it is the maximum that my scooter can manage and brings my battery to near exhaustion. My e-trike can manage this trail and have plenty of charge left over. It is also confidence-building knowing that if ever I exhaust my battery, I can still pedal my way back.

Another aspect that I experienced, and one that I didn't really appreciate until afterwards, is the impact of an active e-trike compared to a passive scooter on my mental health and self concept. While I celebrate the benefits and opportunity that my scooter provides me, I still can't shake the perception that it presents me as 'disabled'. I'm sure that I'm not alone in this feeling. People will look at mobility aids as positive things and offering us opportunities that were not available otherwise. However, we, users of mobility aids, see scooters etc., as representing what we have lost. The e-trike is something else. As an active mobility device, it is much closer to what an ordinary bicycle is to everyone else, and when you are riding it, you feel like an active, able person.

# Five Tips for Going Out as a Catheter User



Whether it's going out to a holiday party or coffee with friends, leaving the house as a catheter user might feel daunting. However, with a little planning and preparation, you can work up to going out with confidence. Here are five top tips from our friends at Coloplast Canada:

- **Plan your activity**

It may be tempting to skip catheterization when you aren't at home, traveling, or if you are with people that don't know about your condition. However, skipping catheterization might result in leaks and can also be harmful to your bladder in the long term.

Plan your activities ahead of time instead so you can enjoy them without interruptions. Set aside time for catheterization during your activities. Catheterize as close to the time you leave your home as possible, and find out where the nearest bathrooms are in advance at a time that is convenient for you.

If you go somewhere to have fun, it is easy to get preoccupied - and that's perfectly okay! Setting an alarm on your phone or watch can help put your mind at ease if you are concerned about remembering when to catheterize.

- **Know where the bathrooms are located**

It may be handy to check out available bathrooms at an event in advance. This may be especially important if you use a wheelchair. Use the internet or call to learn about how the location or venue you are visiting is equipped with accessible bathrooms.

- **Pack extra supplies**

When away from the security of your home, it is good to know that you have all your intermittent catheterization supplies with you. Public restrooms are not as clean and might not be equipped in a convenient way. If you worry about leaks, it may also be important that you can clean yourself or change your clothes. Some people use a different type of catheter when they are away from home. You might want to have a more compact catheter, or one with a urine bag attached. Pack extra supplies – just in case!

- **Choose the right catheter for you**

Choosing a catheter that fits your lifestyle may help with your overall confidence and comfort. SpeediCath® compact catheters are designed to be discreet, so your self-catheterization routine doesn't have to get in the way of your social life.



These catheters come pre-lubricated and ready to use right out of the packaging! SpeediCath® compact catheters are available in both male and female.

• **Consider what to wear**

Wearing dark colours may help make small leaks less noticeable. Have a blazer, sweater or cardigan that you can quickly wrap around your waist if necessary. You might also consider using a pad or incontinence briefs to feel safe from leakage until you feel comfortable in your routine and being out and about.

Get more useful tips in Coloplast's free downloadable eBook, 20 Tips for Self-Catheterization (visit.coloplast.ca/20-tips-self-cath).



*These are general guidelines meant to help you with typical questions. You should follow the specific instructions provided by your healthcare provider and the intermittent catheterization solution you are using.*



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# News

## MPF Trustees

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MPF funds go to work in four main areas that are not supported by other sources in Manitoba:

- special projects
- product testing
- research, and
- direct aid to Manitobans living with SCI

All requests for direct aid are initiated through SCI Manitoba. Individuals must provide information on their finances, explain why they cannot meet the expense within their own budget, and identify any other sources to support the request, including potential for contributions from family.

SCI Manitoba thanks MPF for its continued support and commitment to improving the quality of life of Manitobans living with spinal cord injury. Since the last issue of ParaTracks, MPF has approved one grant totalling \$482.45:

- Financial support was provided to help cover the cost of a four-wheeled walker and a single-point cane for an SCI member. These items will help support the members' independence upon discharge from the hospital.

*Visit MPF's website for more information at [www.scimanitoba.ca/mpf](http://www.scimanitoba.ca/mpf).  
 Information about applying for assistance is available by contacting SCI Manitoba.*



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# MBTelehealth by Shared Health Manitoba



Many people struggle to make it to medical appointments when they don't live near their health care providers or specialists. It can be a great cause of anxiety due to time spent away from work to receive care, the financial burden associated with travelling, the desire for family to attend the appointment, and many other reasons. As a result, many people who live rurally or don't have specialty services in their communities are choosing to access MBTelehealth as an alternative to seeing their health care providers in person.

## What is MBTelehealth?

It is a way for people to connect virtually with their health care providers securely on a monitor. You can see, hear and talk to your providers, and they can communicate with you. MBTelehealth has more than 195 sites located in communities across Manitoba. Many nursing stations, health centres and clinics have access to MBTelehealth. Their website, [www.mbtelehealth.ca](http://www.mbtelehealth.ca), has an interactive map so you can see if these services

are available near you, or ask your health care team if this could be an option for you.

MBTelehealth is a safe way to access your medical providers and health care services. At the time of your appointment, you will attend the health facility where the telehealth equipment is located and be shown how it all works. You can bring family members or a friend along if you choose. You will be introduced to everyone in the meeting, and can request that non-essential people be excluded if you wish. You can stop the meeting at any time and request to attend an in-person instead at a future date. Any personal health information – about you or your health – that is collected, recorded, stored, used or disclosed must be done in accordance with the Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) of Manitoba.

If you have been struggling with getting to your medical appointments, please consider reaching out to your healthcare provider and inquire about MBTelehealth services, it may be right for you.

# Manual Wheelchair Power Assist Options

The shoulder is a complex ball and socket joint similar to the hip, but unlike the hip, the shoulder is best suited for mobility rather than weight-bearing. Manual wheelchair propulsion places considerable stress on the arms and shoulders, which have little muscle mass to compensate for daily tasks like wheeling, transfers and weight shifting. "I consider every transfer, every time you push on your wheel, that's sandpaper. If you push harder on the sandpaper, you're going to be wearing down those little tiny ligaments, tendons and muscles a lot faster," said Tova Plashkes, MSc (PT), in a recent Aging with Spinal Cord Injury information series hosted by SCI BC.

The daily strain on the shoulders routinely leads to pain for wheelchair users. Despite the high prevalence of shoulder pain in manual wheelchair users, there is a relatively low number of studies exploring non-invasive treatments. For some, shoulder surgery can work well and have excellent outcomes, but research indicates a lot of people with SCI continue to experience debilitating pain. The common non-invasive treatment for shoulder pain is exercise, but while exercise is essential for all, it can be difficult to stay motivated and exercise when regularly experiencing soreness or pain. Therefore, it is crucial to examine preventative measures that can be taken before the shoulders are significantly compromised by overuse.

Power wheelchairs positively affect health, occupation, and quality of life, and adding power to a manual wheelchair is a way to improve function and reduce strain in the shoulders. And it can be part of an effective preventative measure for long-term manual wheelchair usage. A power assist device (PAD) does not convert a manual wheelchair into an electric one, but still, it provides speed, greater mobility, and less physical

strain on the user to travel further with less effort. This article will focus on PADs to prolong shoulder and arm mobility and health. PADs have three main mounting styles, referring to where the PAD attaches to the manual wheelchair.

## Rear-mounted

The rear mount PAD is a newer style. A motorized wheel is mounted to the rear axle of the wheelchair, and the prescribed configuration of the manual wheelchair is not impacted. It is most commonly controlled with a frame-mounted joystick or Bluetooth-enabled wireless controller. Rear-mounted PADs are ideal for travel as they are removable, lightweight, and easier to lift and transport. Rear-mounted PADs can also be used to reduce the amount of effort in each push – up to 80% less effort needed.

Pros: Simple clamp-on mounting, which can easily detach but has enough durability to navigate rugged terrain. Newer models use a USB-C port for charging. Many offer 10 km/h max speed and weight capacity max 300 lbs. Rear-mounted PADs can easily detach and are airline-approved.

Cons: Rear-mounted PADs are pricy, starting at \$7,550 CAD. They can be difficult to attach for





users with limited upper extremity function, and impaired balance. The user must be able to safely manage speed when descending ramps or hills. Many are marketed as being user-friendly, with newer models offering app compatibility, although this could deter individuals less comfortable with newer technology. Also, there is conflicting information on whether heavy rain can damage units.

### **Front-mounted**

Front-mounted PADs have been around longer and have more options. A motorized wheel is attached to the front of the wheelchair frame and lifts the front casters off the ground, making the wheelchair resemble a three-wheel trike or scooter. The design is easy to use, and the controls for acceleration and braking vary depending on the user's abilities and preferences.

Pros: Many manufacturers and models offer tool-free assembly and folding for storage. Users can navigate a variety of surfaces including asphalt, concrete, and packed dirt. Front-mounted PADs can turn and reverse quickly, and dramatically improve the ability to manage hills and cross-sloped roads. Many offer a max speed of 20 km/h with a range of 20-24 km on a fully-charged battery. Like rear-mounted PADs, the weight capacity is 300 lbs. Relatively affordable, with models starting at \$2,000 CAD.

Cons: Front-mounted PADs increase the footprint and take up more space, making indoor navigation difficult. Attaching and detaching some of these devices can be complicated. Many front-mounted PADs are not airline-approved. Some models have lower weight limits.

### **Hub-mounted**

Also known as main wheel-mounted, these PADs feature an electric motor and battery either mounted to the standard wheel hub, or mounted directly in the hub of special wheels that replace the standard wheels.

Hub-mounted PADs can be controlled with either a joystick or by directly pushing on the rims, which are connected to sensors that provide a boost based on the force applied, similar to a pedal-assist e-bike. Some of these PADs are programmable and can, for instance, be setup to provide more assist on one side to accommodate users with strength or functional asymmetries.

Pros: Most models provide programmable speeds, making the unit safer for users. Minimal force is required to activate hub-mounted PADs, and there can be automatic adjustments for inclines and declines.

Cons: Hub-mounted PADs add considerable weight to the wheelchair, which can be problematic when needing to lift, assemble/disassemble the wheelchair, and is detrimental if the device loses power, which means the user will need to manually propel the weight of the PAD. These PADs cannot accommodate foot propellers, and the battery range is much less than other PAD types. Modifications to the wheelchair may be necessary, and added hardware may increase the wheelchair width, which can limit access to smaller spaces. Hub-mounted PADs are also pricy, starting at \$7,650 CAD.



PAD technology has changed dramatically over the last decade, and while exciting, it's good to do your own research and learn more about the different PAD types and models – especially as it relates to factors and considerations that may not be top of mind, such as visibility, speed, and strain.

Visibility is paramount – having access to different surfaces and outdoor spaces means more opportunity for accidents when others are unfamiliar with these devices and won't be expecting to encounter a wheelchair moving at higher speeds. Be vigilant and don't assume you are always visible to others nearby.

Similarly, speed can be a serious issue with PADs because they maintain a steady speed, so when a user is climbing a hill, the PAD increases its output to maintain its original speed. However, going downhill can be dangerous if a user gains more momentum than anticipated. Additionally, be mindful of turning corners with speed to avoid losing control.

Finally, PADs can put extra stress on the wheelchair and the user's body that may add risks. Tova Plashkes recommends lower pressure tires when using a PAD because lower pressure tires are more forgiving with bumps and uneven terrain. Higher pressure tires transfer forces more efficiently to the wheelchair and the user and can aggravate pain and spasticity. Additionally, vibrations can, over time, loosen components on the wheelchair.

The user's environment, lifestyle, and routine should be considered when determining which PAD type and model is right, and individuals will need to weigh the pros and cons to help decide whether the investment is worthwhile.

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# INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION

On October 1, 2024, the Board of Directors of Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba received a report from its Truth and Reconciliation sub-committee and accepted all the recommendations in the report, aimed at moving the organization along a clear path toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) in Manitoba.

The recommendations are enshrined in the **Declaration Respecting Indigenous Peoples in Manitoba** that commit the entire organization – employees, volunteers, and members – to specific actions it will undertake in effecting meaningful change in its relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities across the province.

The Declaration was carefully drafted to align with the values and principles espoused by or embedded in:

- the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's** Final Report and Calls to Action
- the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**
- the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**
- the rehabilitation counselling profession's values and principles
- SCI Manitoba's ethical best practices, and
- SCI Manitoba's **Client Bill of Rights**.

Through this Declaration, SCI Manitoba is expressing its desire and intention to join with other individuals and groups in advancing the work of reconciliation in support of Indigenous Peoples and communities located in Manitoba and across Canada.

The commitments described in the Declaration are significant and represent an important shift in our relationship with Indigenous Peoples, and

include a number of activities that will be moving ahead immediately:

*1. Each November, SCI Manitoba will celebrate Indigenous Disability Awareness Month (IDAM). As part of this year's IDAM celebrations, SCI Manitoba staff and volunteers will take part in a full-day of training on Indigenous cultural awareness and safety. See page 25 for the full text of our IDAM Proclamation;*

*2. Content specific to Indigenous Peoples and the issues that impact them will be featured regularly in ParaTracks, on our Facebook page, and on our website;*

*3. A land acknowledgement statement will be read at the beginning of all meetings and gatherings hosted by SCI Manitoba, and will soon be included in email signatures, in each issue of ParaTracks, on our Facebook page and website, and in our publications; and*

*4. Each year on June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day, SCI Manitoba will organize and/or participate in activities recognizing and celebrating the cultures and contributions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Indigenous Peoples of Canada.*

In addition, SCI Manitoba is in the process of planning a series of outreach events where we will engage directly with Indigenous members, community leaders, and Indigenous-serving organizations across the province so we can better understand the extent to which our services and supports are meeting the needs of Indigenous members and their families, and to identify opportunities for improvements. More details will be shared soon.



# A PROCLAMATION

**WHEREAS** Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) living with disabilities in Manitoba and across Canada often face unique barriers that impact their ability to fully participate in the social and economic opportunities available in our communities, and

**WHEREAS** Spinal Cord Injury Manitoba ('SCI Manitoba') is committed to the ideal of an inclusive society based on respect and understanding, where Indigenous Peoples living with disabilities and the significant contributions they provide to our communities, organizations, provinces territories, and country are recognized, celebrated, and valued, and

**WHEREAS** SCI Manitoba is committed to upholding and safeguarding the principles outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, including full and effective participation and inclusion in society, equality of opportunity, and the United Nations' recommendation to Canada to proclaim and recognize November each year as *Indigenous Disability Awareness Month*, and

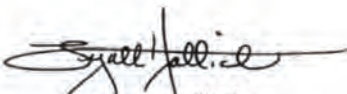
**WHEREAS** SCI Manitoba wishes to recognize and support the *British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society's* (BCANDS) creation of *Indigenous Disability Awareness Month* (IDAM) in 2015 and join governments, urban and rural Indigenous communities, disability organizations, individuals living with disabilities and their families, from Manitoba and across Canada, in recognizing and celebrating these diverse and vital members of our communities.

**NOW THEREFORE**, be it resolved that SCI Manitoba does hereby proclaim and declare annually the month of November as:

## INDIGENOUS DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

Dated this 1st day of October, 2024.

  
Dan Joannisse  
Executive Director

  
Lyall Hallick  
President

# 2024 Prairie Seating Workshop



On September 24 and 25, three members of the SCI Manitoba team attended the Prairie Seating Workshop, organized and hosted by Therapy First, a private occupational therapy services provider in Winnipeg. One of the many presentations that stood out during the two-day conference was "The MAT Assessment", facilitated by Jen Birt, O.T. Reg (MB).

## **What is a MAT assessment and why is it important?**

A MAT assessment is a comprehensive wheelchair seating assessment, postural evaluation, and physical wheelchair assessment that is performed by an occupational therapist. The term MAT is an acronym for mechanical assessment tool.

The physical portion of the MAT assessment includes a supine evaluation (laying on your back), sitting evaluation, measures of active and passive range of motion (ROM), manual muscle testing (MMT), and taking several anatomical measurements. The MAT assessment is an important part of the mobility assessment process, and it is recommended that a wheelchair user with a spinal cord injury be reassessed by an OT every two years. This evaluation will produce information to help define the optimal sitting position when using a wheelchair, as well as how to properly support the person's posture in the wheelchair with seating components – cushion, backrest and other supports – to decrease the effort needed to sit. It will also provide important information about the person's flexibility, balance, and tolerance for sitting in different positions.

## **Why is assessment so important?**

"A wheelchair is an extension of the user's body.

Therefore, it is critical that any prescription for a new wheelchair should match the user's current expectations, preferences, physical needs and functional requirements that emerge out of his or her interactions with the environment," (Batavia M, Batavia AI & Friedman R. 2001). "Studies show that clinically prescribed seating and wheelchair systems promote good posture, greater muscle efficiency, participation in activities, encourage learning, socializing, independence, promote function and participation, and enhanced organ activity," (Sprigle S, De L'Aune W. 2013).

A MAT assessment is not the only tool used to determine wheelchair and seating prescriptions. It does not include an equipment trial or mobility skills assessment, it's not a pressure management assessment, nor a functional assessment of wheelchair use.

## **Where is a MAT assessment performed?**

MAT assessments can be carried out in a variety of different ways and locations. A MAT assessment can be performed at the hospital if a person is an inpatient, in a private occupational therapy clinic, or in a person's home by a community occupational therapist. The location will be determined by a number of factors, including space, surface, equipment needs, care needs, the number of people involved, time needed, and client and therapist tolerances.

Feel free to ask your occupational therapist or SCI Manitoba rehabilitation counsellor if you have questions regarding MAT assessments.

# Ask a Rehabilitation Counsellor



*In this issue, we respond to a reader's question about the Canada Disability Benefit. Questions for future issues of ParaTracks can be submitted through your counsellor or anonymously at [www.scimanitoba.ca/ask](http://www.scimanitoba.ca/ask).*

## **What is the Canada Disability Benefit?**

The **Canada Disability Benefit (CDB)** is a new federal program that aims to reduce poverty, and support the financial security of working-aged Canadians living with a disability.

## **Who is eligible for the CDB?**

The CDB will be available to Canadians with a valid **Disability Tax Credit (DTC)** certificate. In order to qualify, a person must be approved for the DTC, and meet other qualifying criteria related to income, and be between the ages of 18-64.

## **What are the eligibility criteria for the DTC?**

In order to qualify for the DTC, a medical practitioner must certify that you have a severe and prolonged impairment resulting in a marked restriction in one of the categories, or a significant limitation in two or more categories, or receive therapy to support a vital function. You must also be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident.

## **As a person with a disability, what is the amount I can expect to receive?**

In April of this year, the Government of Canada's finance minister announced the budget for the new CDB. The government plans to provide a total investment of \$6.1 billion over six years, with an additional ongoing allocation of \$1.4 billion for operational costs, which is earmarked to deliver a maximum yearly benefit of \$2,400, or \$200/month.

Disability advocates across Canada expressed their disappointment with the benefit, noting that the monthly allowance wouldn't come close to lifting Canadians with disabilities above the

poverty line. According to a November 2023 report, it would require up to \$14,356 per person annually to bridge the gap between the current social assistance for individuals living with disabilities and the poverty line. However, the 2024 federal budget indicates this is only the beginning - the goal is for the combined amount of federal and provincial or territorial income support for people with disabilities to grow to the level of Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) to fundamentally address the rates of poverty experienced by persons with disabilities.

## **How will I apply for the Canadian Disability Benefit?**

The application process has yet to be determined, but there will likely be some alignment and integration with the application for the DTC.

## **When will the new Canada Disability Benefit begin?**

According to the 2024 budget released in April this year, the government plans to issue the first CDB payments by July 2025.

## **How is disability defined in Canada?**

According to the **Accessible Canada Act**, a disability is "any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment—or a functional limitation—whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society." For more details, please visit [www.canada.ca](http://www.canada.ca).

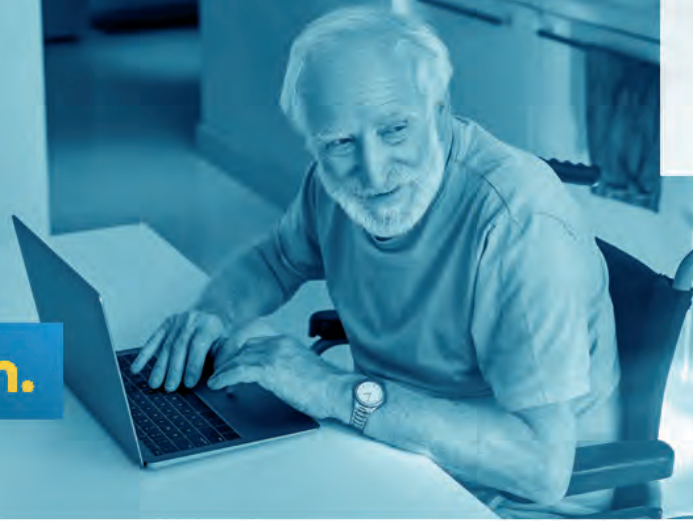


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