

Revised Policy on Wheelchair Fees

Approach

**INTEGRATED PRIMARY AND COMMUNITY CARE BRANCH, HEALTH SERVICES POLICY AND
QUALITY ASSURANCE DIVISION, MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

March 24, 2015

Issue: Clarification of Chargeable extras policy on the provision of wheelchairs in publicly subsidized residential care facilities

The following policy is applicable only to wheelchairs and excludes other mobility equipment. The policy applies to residents in publicly subsidized residential care facilities that are licenced under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act (CCALA)* or the *Hospital Act*.

Principles:

1. **Client centred care:** Medically required and prescribed basic wheelchairs for personal exclusive use of the resident will be provided as a residential care benefit.
 - Residents will not pay for personal exclusive use basic wheelchairs.
2. **Transparency and fairness:** In accordance with the Bill of Rights, residents will be informed of the option to purchase/ rent/ maintain a customized wheelchair.
 - Customized mobility equipment will continue to be a chargeable extra.
3. **Accessibility:** No resident will be denied a service if they cannot afford to pay for it.
 - Hardship provisions for client rates will continue to be available for residents who purchase/ rent customized wheelchairs, depending on their income status.

Definitions

Personal exclusive use is exclusive non-restricted use by a single client.

Wheelchair is a device providing wheeled mobility and seating support for a person with mobility issues.

Basic wheelchair is a manual, self-propelled, safe and durable wheelchair that enhances personal mobility; has a basic contoured seat cushion; and which is reasonable to obtain and maintain.

Modified basic wheelchair is a basic wheelchair with appropriate adjustments, modifications and upgrades to cushion, armrests, and/or back, but excludes all physical (frame) and permanent alterations to the basic wheelchair.

Customized/ Specialized wheelchair is a wheelchair with significant manual/ technical upgrades and modifications and includes custom made wheelchairs to meet an individual's unique needs and/ or lifestyle.

Maintenance is regular cleaning, disinfection, and basic upkeep of a wheelchair at regular intervals to address wear and tear, prevent malfunctions and any other issues that would impact the safety of health care providers, clients, and visitors.

Medically required is health care equipment, supplies, and ambulatory assistive devices that are prescribed by a registered occupational therapist or registered physical therapist, for whom wheelchair prescription is within the therapist's scope of practice.

Revised Policy on wheelchair fees in publicly subsidized residential care facilities:

Policy Intent: Technological advances in assistive devices such as wheelchairs help improve the health and quality of life of the user and promote access and independence. The provision of a basic wheelchair as a residential care benefit ensures that clients have access to a basic, standardized, and safe model of wheelchair.

Current policy on chargeable extras allows service providers to charge residents for purchase, rental, and maintenance of mobility equipment including wheelchairs that are for the personal exclusive use of the client. Wheelchairs used as shared equipment for short-term general use are currently provided as a benefit to the resident.

Under the current policy, residents are responsible for purchase/ rental/ maintenance fees for mobility equipment including wheelchairs that are for the personal exclusive use of the client.

The revised policy effective April 1, 2015, clarifies that service providers must provide a **basic wheelchair to residents who are prescribed a wheelchair as a** medically required piece of mobility equipment. Residents will not pay an additional amount, beyond their assessed client rate, for basic wheelchairs which will now be considered a residential care benefit.

In accordance with the policy on chargeable extras, residents are fully responsible for chargeable extras such as modification costs to the basic wheelchair and for the purchase, rental, and maintenance fees of a specialized or customized wheelchair.

Consistent with the Home and Community Care Policy manual on temporary rate reductions, clients who are unable to afford the cost of modifications to a basic wheelchair or the purchase/ rental and maintenance fees of a specialized or customized wheelchair may be eligible for a temporary rate reduction in their client rate.

Maintenance of wheelchairs and fees:

Regular maintenance and cleaning are the responsibility of the service provider for wheelchairs owned by the service provider. Clients are not responsible for the regular maintenance of the basic wheelchair that is owned by the service provider.

Residents who own their own wheelchairs will be required to keep the wheelchair in good operating condition and are responsible for the regular maintenance and cleaning of their own wheelchair. Residents will have the option to pay a fee to the facility or contract with a private company to ensure regular maintenance of their owned wheelchair.

Hardship waivers:

To ensure that all residents have access to medically required equipment, residents eligible for temporary rate reductions will be allowed to claim the cost of modifications, cost of specialized or customized wheelchairs, and costs of maintenance of their owned wheelchairs as medically allowable expenses.

Rationale for the proposed policy:

The Ministry publicly committed to a review of facility practices regarding chargeable extras, including wheelchair fees in September 2013. The review covered 308 publicly subsidized residential care facilities. The review indicates:

- Wheelchair fees are the most common non-discretionary, medically required chargeable extra in 247 of the facilities that responded.
 - 86% of the surveyed facilities provided residents wheelchair services (purchase/ rental) either directly or through an external vendor.
- There are inconsistent practices in the charging of wheelchair fees across facilities.
 - Of the 33% facilities that directly provided the service, only 11% charged the clients a fee for the service, with the remaining 22% providing it free of cost.
- Facilities are inconsistent in providing information to clients on the optional nature of chargeable extras and receiving client consent for charges.
- Facilities have varied practices for situations where clients cannot afford extra fees.

Policy Approach:

Items and services identified as chargeable extras range from medically required to value added. The Ministry's Review of Chargeable Extras policy concluded that current policy governing mobility equipment including wheelchair fees was the one area that needed further clarification. As well, the use of wheelchairs in facilities has increased significantly due to the high complex care needs of many of the residents.

The Ministry in collaboration with health authorities will continue to update the chargeable extras policy as issues arise.

Based on the review findings, the revised policy will state:

- Basic wheelchairs for personal exclusive use, if they are medically required and prescribed, will be provided to the resident as a benefit, at no additional cost to the resident.
- Residents who require a modified basic wheelchair will be responsible for the full cost of the modifications. Service provider is not expected to provide this service.
- Specialized or customized wheelchairs will continue to be a chargeable extra, with the resident responsible for the full cost of wheelchair.

Policy Implementation

- Policy will come into effect April 1, 2015.
- The remaining Chargeable Extras policy will remain unchanged.