

Vehicle Modifications for Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities and those experiencing the effects of aging may require vehicle modifications to accommodate their driving needs. Available equipment selections include steering adaptations, brake/accelerator systems, hand controls, lifts, locks, back up alarms, rain sensing windshield wipers and driver positioning devices.

User Considerations

The decision to install special equipment and the task of identifying individual adaptive equipment needs requires a team effort. Teams typically include a trained driving evaluator, a qualified vehicle modification dealer and the potential driver. A comprehensive driver evaluation provides the adaptive equipment needed.

For wheelchair and scooter users, lifts can be installed that raise the driver and wheelchair or scooter together, or just the mobility device so that it can be stored. Adjustable power seats that swivel allow riders comfortable entry and exit and facilitate wheelchair or scooter transfers. Strategically located handles and grab bars provide additional positioning assistance. Automatic door openers, remote car starters, power locks and power window controls decrease the amount of movement and strength needed for some driving tasks.

For individuals preferring to remain in their wheelchair while driving or riding, tie-down devices are required to keep the chair securely in place while the vehicle is in motion. Some tie-downs are manually operated, using belts to hook the wheelchair frame to a floor-mounted track. There are also power lockdown devices that allow the individual in a wheelchair to drive directly over an automatic latching mechanism which grabs the lower chair frame and secures it in place.

For those with limited upper body or head movement, wide-angle and spotting mirrors can be used to increase range of vision. They can be placed both inside and outside the vehicle. Customized seat cushioning typically used for positioning and stability can raise a rider up to provide an improved field of view.

Vehicle Considerations

What type of vehicle is needed to accommodate all the equipment that needs to be installed, the wheelchair, the driver and passengers? Are additional adaptations necessary for safe operation? Will existing vehicle safety equipment have to be modified in order to install the adaptive equipment? Does the dealer carry professional liability insurance?

Is there adequate parking space at home and/or work for the vehicle; is there room for loading and unloading?

Vehicle Modification Dealer Considerations

What credentials does the dealer have? How much experience has the dealer had in vehicle modification? Are references available from previous customers having similar modifications?

What types of payment options are available? Is a prescription required? From whom?

What is the time frame for the work? Will the individual need to be available for fittings? Does the dealer provide training? For how long? At what cost?

Is there a warranty? Does the dealer perform ongoing service and maintenance? Do they stock replacement parts?

Funding Considerations

Costs associated with modifying a vehicle vary. Whether you modify a vehicle you already own or purchase a new modified vehicle it pays to investigate funding options. These options may include programs that help pay for all or part of the cost of vehicle modifications and/or alternative financial loan programs. ATAC maintains a list of funding programs available for individuals who are considering vehicle modifications. Although ATAC does not provide funding, we do maintain a database of used assistive devices (including modified vehicles, when available) at <http://backinaction.drnj.org> or by calling 1-800-922-7233.

For additional information contact:

The Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) of DRNJ

210 South Broad Street, Third Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608

For voice assistance and information, please call 1-800-922-7233. TTY users may dial (609) 633-7106, or use the NJ Relay, 711 to reach the 800# above. Visit us on the web at www.drnj.org

The 56 statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Programs form a national network of statewide assistive technology (AT) programs. Information contained in this brochure represents the accumulation of knowledge of this national network. The AT programs receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to implement the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred.

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