



# Wheelchair Provision: how to drive effective change

## Wheelchair Alliance position statement

### Introduction:

The Wheelchair Alliance Community Interest Company (the Alliance) commissioned a research report to identify the recommendations that would underpin better NHS wheelchair provision in England. The research entitled “Wheelchair Provision: how to drive effective change” was undertaken by two independent research organisations, Frontier Economics and Revealing Reality. It was grant funded by the Motability Foundation and published in November 2024.

The report follows on from the Wheelchair Alliance’s first two reports. The first report<sup>1</sup> was published in October 2022. This ‘state of the nation’ piece of research highlighted three key areas of concern:

- that wheelchair services in England do not consistently work for service users,
- that NHS provided wheelchair services should be subjected to more rigorous and mandated regulation and
- that the true scale of demand is not known.

A position statement and priority actions were developed to address these challenges with action continuing to take place to ensure equitable provision across England.

The second report<sup>2</sup> was published in May 2023 and unambiguously showed that the provision of high-quality wheelchairs does not only have a significant beneficial impact on people’s lives but also leads to financial benefits for the NHS and society. It highlighted three areas of focus:

- that there is inequality of provision across the country (a postcode lottery) and commissioners should adopt a mandated Quality Framework and Service Specification,
- that there has been underinvestment in wheelchair services over decades and using conservative assumptions, investment in wheelchair services could result in significant positive economic impact at a ratio of approximately £3 benefit across society for every £1 invested (noting an investment of £22m annually could realise between £60m and £315m savings) and
- that local wheelchair services and commissioners should continue to share best practice and explore opportunities to pool budgets across wheelchair services and other local services.

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<sup>1</sup> [Wheelchair-economic-study-final-report Section 1 Full Report.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [THE VALUE OF A WHEELCHAIR](#)

A position statement and priority actions were developed to address these challenges with action continuing to take place to ensure equitable provision across England.

This third report, rather than highlighting known problems, has provided the actions that should be implemented to ensure effective commissioning of wheelchair services that benefit wheelchair users, wheelchair service providers and funders.

### **Research report findings:**

The research outlined a number of recommendations, which should be introduced collectively rather than taken forward individually in a piecemeal fashion. This will require an integrated approach and collaboration across multiple organisations. The critical recommendations were:

- that there should be greater overall prioritisation of wheelchair services in the NHS
- that there should be increased consistency and collaboration across wheelchair services
- that delivery of Personal Wheelchair Budgets should be enhanced and better understood
- that data collection and use should be improved, with central oversight
- that there should be improvement in the efficiency of procurement and supply chain
- that there should be improvement in retail practices and
- that there should be better integration of wheelchair users voices.

### **Policy recommendation #1**

**That there should be a centralised lead officer within NHS England and within ICBs. NHS England will take an active role in the oversight of wheelchair services in England. NHSE should require each Integrated Care Board to have a dedicated wheelchair service commissioner with the appropriate skills to monitor contracts and design appropriately funded services for their local population**

- NHS England will have a senior responsible officer (SRO) whose role will be to ensure each ICB has a dedicated wheelchair service commissioner and to have ultimate oversight, analysis, review and interrogation of the quarterly data submitted. They will improve data collection and hold ICBs to account for the accuracy of data collection.
- Each ICB will have a dedicated wheelchair commissioner who has the knowledge to plan, fund and contract for wheelchair services in their area. They will have the responsibility to accurately report data and act on the evidence it is providing.
- ICBs will collaborate to ensure the sharing of best practice through regional networks, which will include wheelchair retailers, commissioners and providers.
- ICBs will ensure that all commissioners, providers and wheelchair service users understand Personal Wheelchair Budgets, what they mean, how to access them and other essential information which is easily accessible and provided in understandable, jargon free language.

To support this policy recommendation the Wheelchair Alliance will:

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| Action 1 | Lobby Government and NHS England to ensure that a senior responsible officer is identified and a dedicated wheelchair data set is implemented in a high quality way. We will meet quarterly to discuss the data with NHSE and ensure ICBs are held to account should either data be missing or delivery is outside of defined parameters. |
| Action 2 | Lobby to ensure that a dedicated wheelchair commissioner is identified regionally for each ICB.   |
| Action 3 | Work with a number of ICBs to support the recruitment, training and development of service improvements and share these through networks and a community of best practice.  |
| Action 4 | Support the development of jargon free information which has been tested through the Wheelchair Alliance User Engagement Group/National Board of Wheelchair Users.  |

## Policy recommendation #2

**That NHS England addresses regional and local variation in service quality by defining a national eligibility criterion and by holding each ICB dedicated wheelchair commissioner to account for the governance and quality of the service they are providing.**

- NHS England will work in collaboration with commissioners and other stakeholders to develop a mandated national eligibility criterion, ensuring that this is based on identified need, not on available funding.
- That every ICB will ensure that wheelchair users are fully involved in service design, delivery and improvement by facilitating the development of focus groups.
- That every ICB will demonstrate the quality of their services through the use of the Quality Framework for Wheelchairs, outcome-based tools and regular surveys.

To support this the Wheelchair Alliance will:

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| Action 5 | Lobby for the swift sign off of the Quality Framework and promote it through our website.  |
| Action 6 | Ensure that commissioners, providers and clinicians can access accredited training courses to ensure a universal standard and support continuous professional development. The Wheelchair Alliance will develop an Academy of Practice in collaboration with others with expertise in the relevant fields. |
| Action 7 | Work with trade associations to ensure that retailers have skilled clinical staff to undertake assessments and prescribed appropriate wheelchairs and other related equipment.   |

### Policy recommendation #3

**The Department of Health and Social Care take a more active role in ensuring improvement in quality and efficiency of wheelchair services through efficiency of procurement and supply chain management.**

- DHSC ensures ICBs have an understanding of value-based commissioning and implement it either locally or through pooled budgets across regions.
- NHSE and ICBs work with NHS Supply Chain to lead a national procurement stakeholder forum looking at value, innovation and patient outcomes.
- That efficiency is enhanced through point of care screening, such as bar-coding of equipment, to streamline repair, maintenance, product safety recall and reduce waste.

To support this the Wheelchair Alliance will:

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| Action 8  | Work with DHSC and GS1 to assess and encourage the implementation and roll out of point of care screening.                                |
| Action 9  | Ensure innovative approaches to delivery and procurement are discussed at the Innovation Special Interest Group.                          |
| Action 10 | Develop a working group of key stakeholders to drive recommendations, regularly review developments and identify solutions to challenges. |

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