

## Meeting the needs of disabled children - Adaptations, Equipment & Wheelchairs

To help maximize the quality of life for children with a disability, it is important to understand the duties on local authorities and the NHS to provide specialist equipment, including wheelchairs, and their obligations to fund home alterations.

There is no detailed list setting out in precise terms what every disabled child is entitled to as all the child's rights stem from what their **assessed needs** are; in other words, what your child is entitled to depends on their personal circumstances and how their needs have been assessed. To muddy the water further, eligibility may also differ between areas as local authorities and local NHS authorities (often the local Clinical Commissioning Group) can often determine their own criteria.

The assessed needs for equipment will usually be identified in an **Education, Health & Care Plan** or a **Health Action** plan or an assessment for NHS funded **Continuing Care**.

### Adaptations

The main route to funding for house adaptations is through **disabled facilities grants (DFGs)**. These are available through an application process and there is a **duty** on housing authorities to pay a DFG to a qualifying person and to do so within a specified time limit. The maximum amount is prescribed by law and is currently £30,000.

To qualify for a DFG, the adaptations/alterations must be considered **grant eligible work**. This is defined in law and national guidance, and includes facilitating access to bathrooms, the garden and a kitchen area. The work must be in relation to the disabled child's main residence and the relevant authority must be satisfied that:

- the relevant works are **necessary and appropriate** to meet the needs of a disabled child; and
- it is **reasonable and practicable** to carry out the relevant works, having regard to the age and condition of the home.

Eligibility for DFGs for to meet the needs of disabled children **should not be means tested**.

If the cost of the work required is over the threshold or the qualifying criteria are not met, housing authorities do have a wide discretion to give **grants or loans**. The guidance gives examples as small scale works outside DFG schemes or helping to buy a property. Housing authorities should have policies to explain their criteria and how to apply.

NHS bodies, as well as housing authorities, have the power to fund house adaptations. This may apply if adaptations are needed to meet a healthcare need, which has been assessed (usually within the context of continuing healthcare).

### Equipment

Equipment for living in the community may be available from either a local authority or an NHS body where a disabled child is assessed as having a need for fixtures, fittings, or equipment. The NHS usually fund equipment needed for health care needs (such as a medical bed or mattress); the local authority usually funds equipment needed for social care needs (such as a grab rail or fall alarm).

The types of equipment that may be available include:

Grab handles	Commodes	Rails
Hearing loops	Lever taps	Ramps
Ramps	Crutches	Fall alarm
Communication aids	Wheelchairs for temporary use	

The authorities should work in partnership and have 'integrated equipment services'. Unfortunately disputes can arise between authorities about who is responsible for providing the equipment. Any dispute should not delay providing equipment to a disabled child where a need has been identified.

### Wheelchairs

The NHS has a **duty** to provide wheelchairs and assessments for eligibility are usually via **local wheelchair services**. GPs should support access to the services, but the assessments are usually carried out by **Occupational Therapists** or **Physiotherapists** or both.

The types of wheelchairs available include electric powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs and specialist buggies. Eligible children may be offered a voucher to purchase a wheelchair themselves or signposted to the **Motability Scheme** if the child receives higher rate mobility DLA.

Provision varies across the country and long waiting times are common. Charities such as **Whizz Kids** provide help to those with unmet needs.

Disabled children with an assessed need should not be left with an unsuitable wheelchair, especially if it causes pain and lessens their quality of life, or ability to access education for example.

### Asserting these rights

Usually the first step if you believe your child's needs have been wrongly assessed or has an assessed need not being met is to make a formal complaint. If this does not resolve matters, legal advice should be sought quickly. Legal aid will often be available and as long as you have no conflicting interest, you will be able to instruct a lawyer on your child's behalf (legally known as being a Litigation Friend).

### Meet the team

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