IN BRIEF An Environmental Scan

Power Mobility for Preschool Children

Key Messages

• Despite substantial interest in the provision of alternative power mobility devices for preschool children with developmental motor or cognitive disabilities, the survey results suggest that current systems in place for funding and clinical practice focus on power wheelchairs (WCs).

• The level of public funding, assessment and training practices, availability of device loaning, and support systems for power mobility vary between regions.

Context

Independent mobility in preschool children is critical for cognitive and psychosocial development. There is evidence that independent mobility can stimulate psychological change, and the development of self-awareness, spatial orientation, emotional attachment, and visual vestibular integration.

Technology

Power mobility devices allow children with developmental motor and cognitive disabilities to move independently. These devices include traditional powered WCs, as well as commercial and customized mobility toys and mobility platforms, also referred to as ride-on or riding toys (e.g., Cooper car, Gobot). These devices can be used for training, general mobility, or exploratory play. Individuals with cerebral palsy, multi-limb paralysis, severe motor impairments, and a range of other physical disabilities may benefit from power mobility.

Issue

It has been proposed that children with disabilities should be given the same opportunities as other children to move independently and interact with their environment. Despite evidence of effectiveness and applicability of power mobility in young children, these technologies may be underutilized and supply may be limited. It is also unclear what approach practitioners and payers are taking in prescribing, supporting, and funding the use of power mobility in preschool children and what the resource implications of these devices are for payers and families. The CADTH Environmental Scan report titled Power Mobility for Preschool Children aims to provide information about provision, funding, prescribing, and use of power mobility, which may be useful to inform strategic planning.

Methods

The Environmental Scan report summarizes Canada-specific information obtained through a literature search and survey of key informants gathered between November 13 and December 14, 2015.

Objectives

1. Describe the Canadian funding practices related to power mobility for preschool children
2. Identify the types of equipment acquired, funded, and made available by institutions to preschool children with mobility impairment
3. Describe how health care providers in Canada are trained for the prescribing of power mobility in preschool children
4. Describe how preschool children and their caregivers are trained and supported (e.g., initial training, follow-up, technical support, and maintenance service) regarding the use of power mobility.

Results

• The current context for power mobility varies substantially across jurisdictions.

• Disparities in funding, availability of devices, and clinical and device support were observed; however, several common features across jurisdictions emerged.

• Pediatric power WCs are prescribed universally, albeit at varying frequencies.

• Alternative power mobility devices are less frequently prescribed and may depend on the expertise and funding strategies of providers.
• Funding support models for pediatric mobility do not include alternative devices such as ride-on toys, which rely solely on private funding.

• Registered occupational or physical therapists prescribe power devices, but may require further training and provincially mandated certification, as well as oversight by a physician in some regions.

• To procure a device, children need to be assessed and trained.

• Loans for training are not available in all jurisdictions.

• Barriers to power mobility for preschool children may include geographical restraints, lack of accessibility to a therapy centre, limited access to loaner devices, lack of clinical prescribing expertise, and the cost of devices and associated therapy and maintenance.

Read more about CADTH and its Environmental Scan on power mobility for preschool children at:
cadth.ca/power-mobility-for-preschool-children

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