



# CONSUMER GUIDE

TO PURCHASING WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT





The National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) is a non-profit trade association dedicated to expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities to drive or be transported in vehicles modified with mobility equipment. Made up of over 600 mobility dealers, manufacturers and driver rehabilitation specialists, NMEDA members work together to ensure quality, safety and reliability through the Quality Assurance Program™ (QAP). For drivers and passengers with disabilities, working with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer ensures a commitment to accessibility for all.

[NMEDA.com](http://NMEDA.com)



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For a driver or passenger with mobility challenges, having a safe and reliable method of transportation can make going about your day more comfortable while eliminating stress. If you, or a loved one, live with a disability, choosing the right type of vehicle and adaptive equipment to be your main source of accessible transportation can help ensure you're safe and confident while on the road. Because of the impact this can have on your day-to-day life, it's extremely important to make an educated decision and purchase.

The process begins with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), who manufacture the actual, stock vehicles to later be converted into accessible modes of transportation. A manufacturer of adaptive equipment then receives the vehicle and may perform substantial structural and mechanical alterations, such as installing a wheelchair ramp, lowering the floor, etc. Once completed, the vehicle is shipped to a Quality Assurance Program™ (QAP) dealer to provide and install additional adaptive equipment depending on the needs of the buyer.

Only working with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer ensures your mobility needs are fully met by experienced, knowledgeable industry professionals upholding the highest quality standards in every vehicle conversion and installation.

This guide, along with the help of your local QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer, will provide you with the tools to make the buying process safe, seamless and professional.

**When searching for an adaptive mobility specialist, NMEDA membership should serve as your stamp of approval because all QAP-accredited NMEDA dealers offer:**

- Individual, in-person evaluations and custom vehicle modifications
- Specialized training in adaptive technology and innovation
- 24-hour emergency roadside services nationwide



# HOW TO BUY

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Purchasing a wheelchair accessible vehicle is a big decision. If you have a mobility challenge and are in need of accessible transportation, it's difficult to know where to start when it comes to finding, purchasing and learning about your new or used vehicle. These next steps will help you get on the road to independence:



## one > Contact a NMEDA QAP dealer.

Whether you are a driver or a passenger with a disability, a consultation with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer should be your first stop in the buying process. A QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer can provide in-depth knowledge of the different types of equipment available, will recommend the best vehicles for the equipment you need, help you find a local Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS) for an evaluation, and provide you with financing options. Unlike an automotive dealer, their emphasis is on mobility equipment and wheelchair accessible vehicles—matching the right solution with the right person. To locate a mobility dealer near you, go to [www.nmeda.com](http://www.nmeda.com).

## two > If you are a driver with a disability, set up an appointment to get evaluated by a Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS).

During your evaluation, a CDRS will assess your motor skills, strength, coordination, perception and cognitive skills. These assessments will help determine your specific equipment needs, and you will be provided a written prescription. If you want to explore the possibility of getting behind the wheel of an adaptive vehicle, visit the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED), [www.driver-ed.org](http://www.driver-ed.org), to find a CDRS near you.

## three > Do your homework.

Here are some additional steps you may want to discuss with your mobility dealer and/or CDRS:

- **Consider your needs** – What are the dimensions and features of your wheelchair? Will you be driving the vehicle independently or are you looking for a vehicle that you can be a passenger in? Do you want a transfer seat or will you be driving while in your wheelchair or another mobility device? Each of these questions must be evaluated before you can determine whether you need a side or rear-entry vehicle, as well as any additional structural modifications.
- **Evaluate your lifestyle and daily routine** – How much parking space is available at home for a ramp or lift to deploy? How often do you leave your home? What are your most visited destinations and is there handicap parking available? Is there more than one wheelchair user in your household? These answers will help you determine the type of vehicle and equipment that will be best suited for your lifestyle, such as a minivan, SUV, truck, car, ramp, lift, etc.
- **Establish a budget** – How much can you afford to pay? Remember to consider a down payment, monthly payments, insurance, gas and an estimate for yearly maintenance. Your budget will play a large role in deciding whether to buy a new or used vehicle, or whether to adapt your current vehicle. There are rebates, grants, loans and other financial aids available for people with disabilities—take advantage of them. See page 15 for more information on funding.
- **Educate yourself** – Research your mobility options and have an idea of the type of equipment you are looking for. See page 7 for more information on what to buy.
- **Insist on QAP** – Not all mobility equipment installers follow a structured quality assurance program or are accredited by a third party. Before you buy, ask if they are QAP accredited.



## four > Make your purchase.

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After your initial consultation, you may decide to purchase your accessible van or car directly from a QAP-accredited NMEDA Dealer. When making your purchase, if you decide to buy a vehicle from an automotive dealer and then have it adapted with mobility equipment from a NMEDA dealer, keep in mind the recommended vehicle guidelines set by your NMEDA dealer during your original consultation. Be sure to test-drive the vehicle or one that is similar before you make a purchase.

## five > Get driver training.

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Once your vehicle and equipment are purchased, you'll need to learn how to use them. If special mobility equipment is used for driving, it may require a few training sessions with your CDRS to effectively and safely drive a modified vehicle.

## six > Get reimbursed.

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When available, submit your Mobility Assistance Reimbursement Application to the appropriate vehicle manufacturer. The step-by-step process may differ from company to company, so it's best to visit the website for your particular vehicle manufacturer and download the correct forms before your purchase.



# WHAT TO BUY

# WHAT TO BUY

## VEHICLES

From minivans and full-size vans to pickup trucks, sedans, SUVs, low speed vehicles, and even motorcycles, there are a number of options available when choosing an adaptive vehicle suited for your needs. Your QAP-accredited mobility dealer can help you identify the right vehicle for you, however it's also important to consider the following:

**Minivans** provide economical gas mileage, are easy to park and permit quick transfers in and out of the driver's seat. There is also a variety of minivan manufacturers and models to choose from.

- **Side entry** minivans are typically for people in wheelchairs who intend on being the primary driver.
- **Rear entry** vehicles are more commonly used for caregivers of a person with disability, with the caregiver being the primary driver.

**Full-size vans** are more spacious vehicles, which are recommended for larger families with multiple members in a wheelchair or for an individual using a large power wheelchair that would not traditionally fit in a minivan.

**Trucks and specialty vehicles** are available for people with disabilities who would prefer a more unique mode of transportation. Typically, power lifts will hoist and store wheelchairs in the bed of the truck from either the side door or tailgate. Low speed vehicles that can operate up to 25 miles per hour are a great choice for in-town drivers. Specialty vehicles such as motorcycles are also available for modification.





## EQUIPMENT

Working with a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer, you'll be able to explore a wide range of adaptive equipment to find the solutions that will help your time in the car or behind the wheel be as safe and comfortable as possible. Below is an overview of some of the options available:

### Hand Controls

For seniors and those with progressive muscle weakness, hand controls can compensate for decreasing strength and range of motion in the driver's hands and legs. Occupational therapists often recommend such devices.

- **Push/pull controls** require the most arm strength. The control must be pushed to brake; pulled and held to accelerate.
- **Push/right angle controls** are the most popular because they're less fatiguing than push/pull. The user must push the control forward to brake and down toward the thigh with a slight pull to the torso for acceleration.
- **Push/twist controls** are very similar to a motorcycle. The vehicle will accelerate with a twist of the handle and will brake with a push on the hand control lever.
- **Push/rock controls** are similar to slot machines. The driver must rock his or her hand on the top of the handle—rocking back to accelerate and forward to apply the brakes.

## EQUIPMENT (continued)

### Steering Aids

There are many types of steering aids available that only require the drivers to use minimal effort for steering or are designed specifically for quadriplegics:

- **Steering column extensions** bring the steering wheel 2" to 6" closer to the wheelchair driver. It provides extra legroom and compensates for reduced range of movement.
- **Deep-dish steering wheels** bring the steering wheel rim approximately 4" closer to the wheelchair driver and are normally used with a low-effort steering system. These steering aids improve wheelchair accessibility and lessen the range of steering motion.
- **Foot steering controls** transfer hand control to foot operation. Auxiliary and secondary vehicle controls are also adapted to foot operation.
- **Horizontal steering columns** are motorized, telescoping steering columns customized for those who experience limited arm strength and range of motion, and those who cannot use a conventional steering wheel.
- **Low-effort steering** reduces the strength needed to steer by about 40 percent.
- **Zero effort steering** reduces the strength needed to steer by about 70 percent.
- **One-hand drive control systems** are designed for people with limited or no use of lower extremities but good strength in one arm and hand. Its main component is a knob through which the steering, brake and throttle are activated.
- **Steering spinners** are designed for drivers who must steer with one hand. They come in a variety of configurations including an amputee ring, knob, "quad-steering cuff," palm grip, tri-pin and v-grip.
- **Steering forks** support people with reduced grip function. The hand stays safely in place with support of the back of the hand and enables secure control of the vehicle.



## EQUIPMENT (continued)

### Ramps

Ramps are versatile and can be purchased at a lower cost than lifts, which makes them a popular item among wheelchair users. Portable ramps can be mounted on most vehicles without having to alter the structure of the vehicle and are easy to transfer and store. Since they are not permanently attached to the vehicle, they can also be used on vehicles, trailers, steps and porches. Your QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer can help you identify the type of ramp most suited to your needs and lifestyle. Some styles of ramps include:

- **Basic ramps** are lightweight enough to be used with little exertion by a caregiver or attendant. They are not mechanical, so they do not break down easily and rarely need expensive repairs. They take up minimal space when folded.
- **Roll-up ramps** allow you to easily roll up the ramp, put it in a bag and store it in the back of a van, trunk of a car or under a seat.
- **Channel or track wheelchair ramps** are two thin ramps that provide a channel for each side of the wheelchair. Bumpers on each one prevent the wheelchair from falling off. These ramps can hold up to 600 pounds or more depending on the brand.



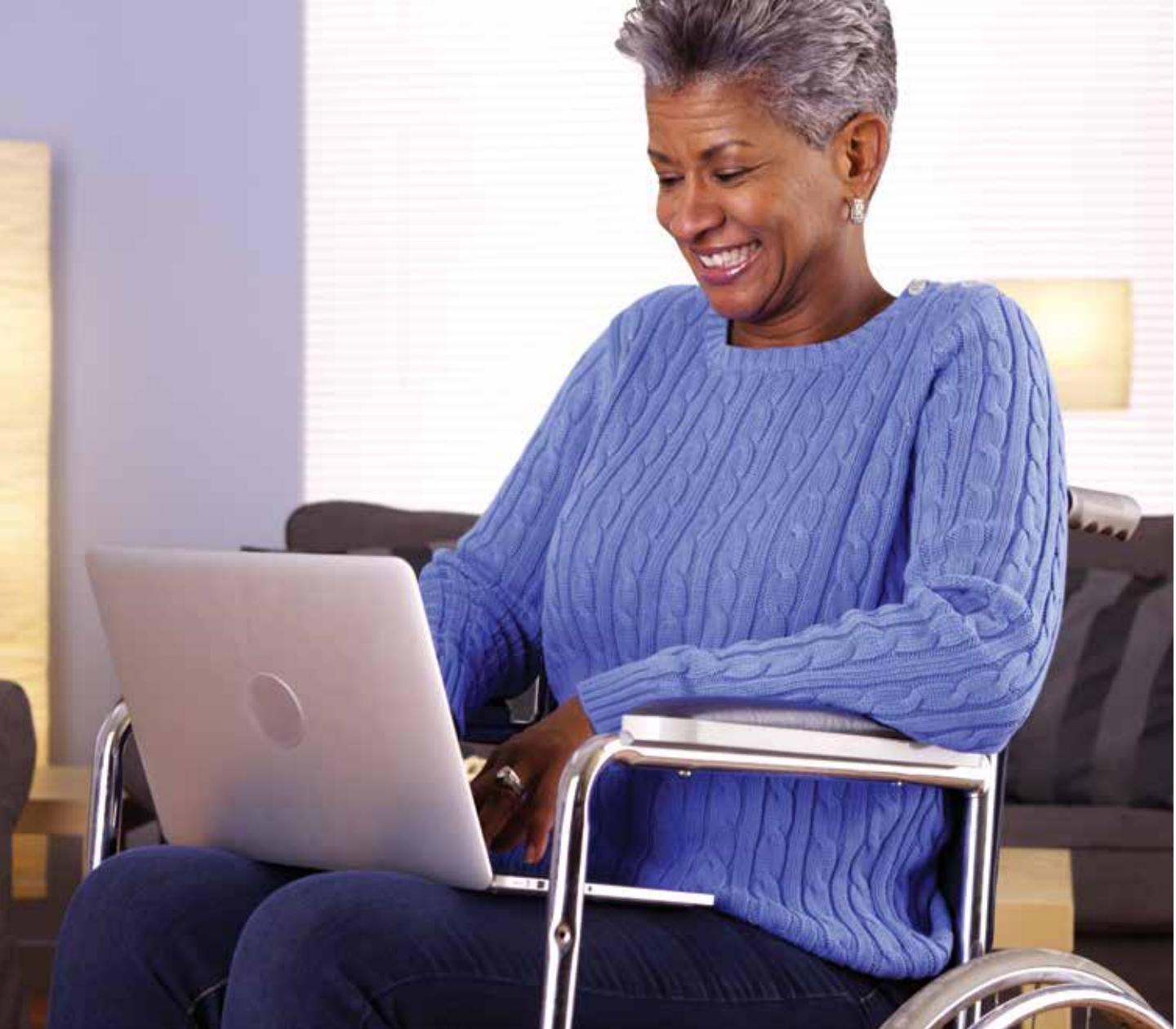
## EQUIPMENT (continued)

### Lifts

Wheelchair lifts for your accessible vehicle are available with a variety of features such as whisper-quiet operation and remote controls, depending on your needs and budget. Although their automation makes them more convenient than ramps, they are more expensive. Other features include:

- **Automatic or electric roll stops** assure the wheelchair stays in place during operation.
- **Threshold sensor mats** are installed inside the van to warn users against exiting if the lift is not level with the floor of the van.
- **Integrated manual backup systems** provide a manual backup pump within the driver's reach and allow the platform to be raised and lowered manually in case of a power failure.
- **Bridging mechanisms** allow users to safely board the lift from sidewalks or inclines.
- **Standard hand-held control, on-lift controls and remote controls** assist with lift operations.



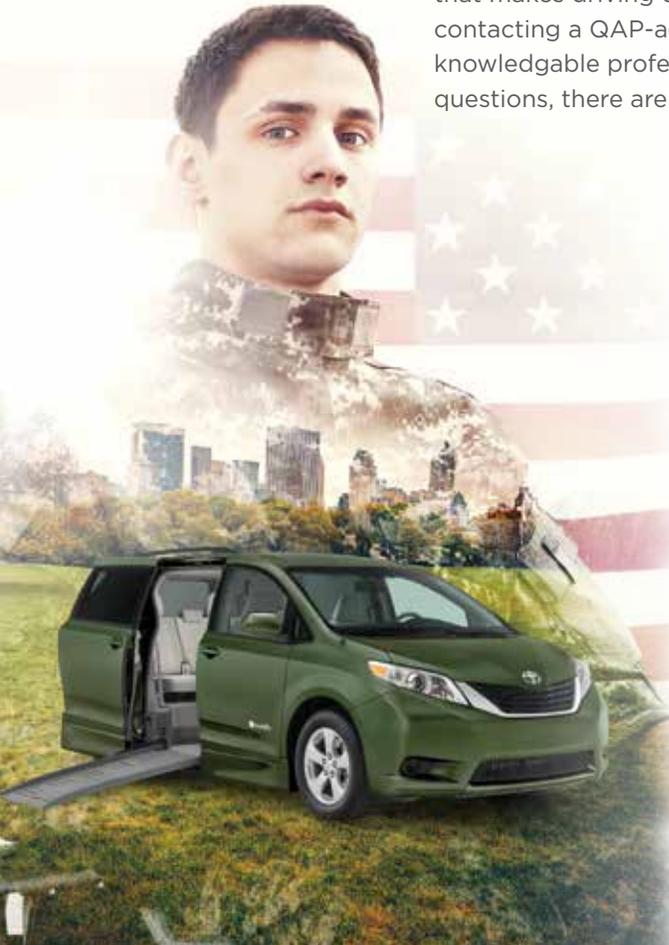


# MOBILITY TERMS

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If you have recently become a person with a disability or a senior with reduced strength that makes driving difficult, the jargon of the mobility industry can be confusing. Aside from contacting a QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer to ensure you're working with an experienced, knowledgeable professional who can accurately guide you and provide answers to your questions, there are a few terms to familiarize yourself with during your purchase process.

- **WAV** is an abbreviation referring to a Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle.
- **Quality Assurance Program™/QAP** is NMEDA's answer to setting and constantly raising the standards of safety, quality and reliability through structured processes, rules, guidelines and third-party audits. It is the only nationally recognized quality assurance program within the automotive mobility industry.
- **Adaptive** means something that has been changed or modified to suit a new or different purpose. If a vehicle is adapted for wheelchair use, the floor may be raised, a lift or ramp installed, doors widened and more.
- **Conversion** is what they do to a van or other vehicle to make it accessible and driveable for those with disabilities. A vehicle rolls off the assembly line at a manufacturing plant as a passenger van without ramps or lifts or other wheelchair or accessible equipment. The van is modified by a separate company—a NMEDA manufacturer that installs accessible and adaptive devices. It is then called a conversion van.
- **Kneeling** refers to the van which actually “kneels” by lowering itself closer to the ground for easy ramp loading and unloading. Air suspension puts the magic in kneeling. It makes it easier to get a wheelchair into and out of the vehicle.





# SAFETY & FUNDING

## SAFETY FIRST

As part of their membership, all NMEDA mobility equipment dealers are required to participate in the Quality Assurance Program, ensuring the entire network is always working to uphold the highest standards of safety in equipment installations and accessible vehicle conversions. This commitment to on the road security and reliability is kept up by expertly trained staff providing individual, in-person evaluations and accredited technicians completing mobility vehicle conversions.

## FUNDING

Although purchasing a wheelchair accessible vehicle can be expensive, your QAP-accredited NMEDA dealer can guide you to special funding and financing programs that may benefit you. Below are a few general options to research:

- **State/provincial agencies** – Every state has a Vocational Rehabilitation Program. These are state funded programs that assist disabled individuals to get back into or remain in the workplace. In some cases they provide funding for vehicle modifications. Check with your local mobility dealer to help find programs and third party funders in your area.
- **Veterans Administration** – The US Veterans Administration funds up to \$18,900 for adaptive equipment for qualifying veterans. For more information visit [www.prosthetics.va.gov/AAE](http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/AAE).
- **Charitable organizations/churches** – The options here can be extensive. Research what is available in your local market.
- **Mobility rebate programs** – Several OEM manufacturers (GM, Ford, Toyota, etc.) provide rebates to purchasers of new vehicles that require modifications for disabilities. Before you purchase a new vehicle for modifications, inquire with your NMEDA dealer about applicable rebates or go to [www.nmeda.com/how-to-buy/rebates](http://www.nmeda.com/how-to-buy/rebates).

- **Special finance programs** – A variety of programs are available for financing mobility vehicles including loans with extended terms, leasing packages and more. Please ask your NMEDA dealer for more information about special financing programs offered.
- **Fundraising** – Contact all the people in your life and turn your need for a mobility solution into an outlet for socializing and creativity that can bring your whole community together. Get local news agencies involved by explaining what you're trying to do and ask if they'd be interested in covering your story.
- **Public assistance** – Depending on your disability and if you are on Social Security, you may be eligible for the PASS program. If you need an accessible vehicle to go to school or your job, they may be able to help you.
- **Grants** – There are several different organizations for different disabilities that provide information, support and resources to help assist those with specific conditions. For example, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society might help if you have MS or United Cerebral Palsy may be able to help if you have CP. Reach out to the local chapter and see if they can help provide assistance or guidance.





3327 W. Bearss Ave. > Tampa, FL 33618 > 866.948.8341

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