

Accessing the community using powered mobility: Evaluating and training safe wheelchair and scooter use with older people.

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Introduction:

Many older people want to retain access to the community despite ceasing driving, and in Australia, older people commonly use powered mobility devices (PMDs) such as scooters and wheelchairs for this. However, PMD accidents are a concern with 69 deaths among older people between 2007-2016. If we conservatively double the 2012 estimate of the number of older Australian PMD users, there are over 460,000 people who may need support to use a PMDs safely. In Japan, PMD use is relatively uncommon. However, we do know that in 2024, 448,476 people voluntarily surrendered their license for fear of causing accidents. It is possible that many of these older people subsequently have greatly reduced community access and could benefit from PMD use.

Objective: The aims of this presentation are to (i) explore how occupational therapists can support PMD use with older people, (ii) introduce a reliable and valid PMD assessment and training tool, and (iii) review research to increase safety for people using PMDs on public buses.

Approach:

This presentation will commence with a brief review of the OT role with PMDs to promote community access. Research on the reliability and validity of the Powered Mobility Device Assessment and Training Tool (PoMoDATT) (Townsend & Unsworth, 2019) will be presented, together with how to use the tool to improve safe PMD use among older people. Government-funded research to improve the stability and safety of people using their PMDs on public low-floor buses will be presented including computerized modeling of the forces that produce slide and tip, and how mobility devices can be actively and passively contained on public buses.

Conclusion:

Safe PMD use can promote community mobility among older people, enhancing quality of life and supporting people to remain at home. Occupational therapists are ideally placed to support PMD use.