

ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES

The use of a wheelchair or scooter often requires the need for a specialized vehicle to transport the wheelchair user and the equipment that the individual uses. If the wheelchair user cannot transfer to the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) seat and/or uses a power wheelchair, the use of a wheelchair accessible vehicle would be required to safely transport the individual using both a specialized securement system (to secure the wheelchair) and a three-point harness seatbelt (to secure the individual). A scooter may also necessitate the need for a wheelchair accessible vehicle but it is important to remember that at no time should an individual ride on their scooter inside a vehicle. The scooter may be secured inside the vehicle similarly to a wheelchair but the occupant must transfer to the OEM seat while the vehicle is in motion. The tiller on the scooter makes riding on the scooter in a vehicle dangerous as opposed to a power wheelchair where the joystick is located on an armrest of the power wheelchair.

- There are many non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) companies that can offer transportation to and from medical appointments for individuals who use a wheelchair (power or manual) full-time. Individual's medical insurance may offer a benefit for this type of service.
- Many communities offer Para-Transit service to individuals who use specialized mobility equipment. This would be a service offered through your local public transportation provider, check your local community for available resources.
- An individual may also rent a wheelchair accessible vehicle for a day, week, month or even longer. A valid driver's license as well as personal vehicle insurance is required of the individual who will be driving the vehicle. Ability Van Rentals has locations throughout the state of Ohio for your convenience. www.abilityvanrentals.com
- Individuals may desire a wheelchair accessible vehicle of their own. We will explore some options below.

Purchasing a Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle

There are many factors to consider when making an investment in a wheelchair accessible vehicle. Safety is a universal concern and one of the main benefits of owning a vehicle designed for adaptive use. With adaptive equipment specifically designed to facilitate transportation for those with physical limitations, a wheelchair accessible vehicle can provide the added safety you need to feel confident and secure on the road.

Your search should start with finding a provider that is a member of the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA). NMEDA is committed to providing the highest level in safe and reliable adaptive transportation through the Quality Assurance Program. Selecting a QAP Accredited Dealer means you are guaranteed expert attention in helping you find the right accessible solutions for your needs.

Visit the NMEDA website to locate a local QAP accredited dealer. www.nmeda.com/locate-dealer

Choosing Your Vehicle and Equipment

There are more options than ever available to individuals with physical limitations. The most popular solutions are modified minivans (Dodge Caravan, Honda Odyssey, etc.) and full sized vans (Ford Transit, Dodge Promaster, etc.). There are other solutions available such as modified pickup trucks and SUVs, as well as the MV-1. We are going to focus on the most popular and cost effective solutions such as the modified minivans and full-sized vans.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles, for the most part, consist of a chassis (base vehicle such as a minivan or full-sized van) plus a conversion or a vehicle lift. The type of vehicle and equipment that will best suit your needs can be determined by visiting your local NMEDA mobility dealer and working with a Mobility Consultant. www.nmeda.com/locate-dealer

Modified minivans fall into one of two categories: Side-entry or Rear-entry.



A side entry van allows a wheelchair user to drive or sit in the front passenger position, while staying in their mobility device.



A rear-entry vehicle is often a good choice if the wheelchair user will not drive, or ride up front, and is budget conscious, as a rear-entry conversion is generally lower in cost.

Other considerations in a minivan conversion would be: power sliding doors, manual vs. power ramp, an in-floor vs. a foldout ramp, and kneel system. (A kneel system allows the van to lower on the passenger side as the ramp deploys to further lower the grade of the ramp for easier entry and exit into the vehicle.)



Full-sized vans, such as the Ford Transit can be an excellent solution for larger individuals that use a large, heavy, power wheelchair, or a family where multiple family members use mobility equipment.

Purchasing a wheelchair accessible vehicle is not like purchasing a traditional vehicle. You will want to visit your local mobility dealer and work with a Mobility Consultant to explore your options.

www.nmeda.com/locate-dealer

There are many things to consider to ensure a safe and comfortable ride in a vehicle that will give you many years of service. These vehicles carry a considerable cost. Making a poor choice in the chassis, conversion, lift or other adaptive equipment can result in a poor fit of the wheelchair in the vehicle, uncomfortable ride, difficulty with entry and exit into the vehicle, and potential unsafe transport. However, just like traditional vehicles, your local mobility dealer will have a selection of vehicles available, both new and preowned, to fit most budgets.

Funding Your Vehicle and Adaptive Equipment

One of the most talked about subjects is the price of a wheelchair accessible vehicle. A brand new van can be out of the range for many on a fixed income. However, a used wheelchair van can be a possibility. Already own a van? Depending on the year, make, model, and condition of your van, it could be converted by a NMEDA QAP dealer. Beginning your search with a NMEDA QAP dealer will allow you to explore new, used, and converting your current van options.

To give you an idea of cost, below is a price breakdown for a new wheelchair accessible van.

Here is an example:

Starting cost of a chassis (new minivan like a Chrysler Pacifica)	\$30,410
Average cost of a side-entry power conversion	\$26,000
<u>Average cost of a docking station, installed</u>	<u>\$2,850</u>
Total potential cost	\$59,260

**Prices shown are only an example of what your actual vehicle and equipment may cost. Your mobility consultant can give you exact prices based on your equipment needs and chassis desired.*

There is limited funding assistance available if you know where to look.

Vehicle Loans: Similar to purchasing a traditional vehicle, financing for a wheelchair accessible vehicle is available. A finance application must be completed and funding is offered through both traditional banks as well as special lenders that work exclusively with individuals who require adapted vehicles and equipment.

Veteran's Administration: In 2008 the VA Secretary Established ALS as a Presumptive Compensable Illness. Veterans should explore their benefits as the cost of a wheelchair accessible vehicle could be

covered by the VA. Paralyzed Veterans of America is an excellent resource for assistance with this benefit. You can find more information about Paralyzed Veterans of America. www.pva.org

Medicaid Waiver: Many of the Medicaid Waivers offer funding assistance towards the conversion of a van to make it wheelchair accessible. Waivers may be offered through the Area Agencies on Aging as well as the Department of Developmental Disabilities. Consult with your caseworker or support service administrator to explore the potential of assistance through the Medicaid Waiver.

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities: This is the new home of Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. This organization assists individuals with disabilities to find employment in the community and post-secondary education. Transportation is often a barrier to community employment and education, a transportation benefit may be available to assist individuals in their programs.

Mobility Rebate Programs: Most major vehicle manufacturers have a mobility rebate available. These rebates average \$1,000 and are used to help offset the cost of adaptive equipment or a vehicle modification. These rebates are only available on the purchase of a new chassis (used/preowned vehicles do not qualify) and have specific documentation and timelines that must be followed in order to be reimbursed. A mobility consultant is well-versed on available mobility rebates and terms of use for each manufacturer.

Grants: There are some grants available to assist with the funding of a wheelchair accessible vehicle. Start your application process early as many of the grants are awarded on a quarterly basis and require significant documentation to receive an award. Some available grant opportunities include:

National Organization for Vehicle Accessibility: www.novafunding.org

Assistance with the cost of a conversion for a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

Community Fund Management Foundation: www.cfmf.org

Grants for individuals with disabilities

Friends of Man: www.friendsofman.org

Grants for individuals with disabilities

The organizations listed above are only examples of funding options/grants/charities that may be able to help. Each organization sets their own criteria under which funds may be granted. Don't forget to check

with local organizations such as your place of worship or civic organizations to investigate if funding assistance may be available through these local organizations as well.

Many people have taken to **crowd-funding** as a way to assist with medical expenses. Most are familiar with www.gofundme.com. There is another, similar, resource available www.HelpHopeLive.org. Help Hope Live is exclusively for individuals with unmet medical and related expenses. They also offer coaching to help with your online fundraising efforts.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of funding sources available. A mobility consultant and local mobility dealership may have additional resources for you to explore and the use of an internet search may uncover even more available assistance.

Mobility Equipment Dealers in Ohio



www.mariettamobilityservices.com

740-374-9713



www.mobilityworks.com

877-275-4907

Toledo, Akron, and Cincinnati



www.keymobility.com

937-374-3226



www.columbusmobility.com

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