

Report for WHO

Report on Grant Systems in Japan for Assistive Products

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I. Introduction

Assistive devices supplement and alternate the functionality of persons with disabilities. Although assistive devices are essential to the rehabilitation and daily lives of persons with disabilities, they have not necessarily reached everyone who needs them. There are several reasons for this.

One of the reasons is that there are not enough prosthetists and orthotists who can make them. In light of this, the development of an educational system would be necessary to provide appropriate training. The second reason is that there are not enough therapists, such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists, to facilitate the rehabilitation process (i.e., helping someone with disabilities learn how to control their assistive devices). Likewise, this would require the education and training of staff for such rehabilitation. The third reason is that there is currently a lack of places to conduct rehabilitation (i.e., rehabilitation centers). The fourth reason is that assistive devices are expensive and so require money to obtain.

Because assistive devices are expensive, public financial assistance and grant systems are necessary for them to reach everyone who needs them.

Fortunately, Japan has implemented an Assistive Device Grant System, which allows anyone who is in need of an assistive device to obtain one. Needless to say, the system is imperfect and still has room for improvement.

What follows is a report on Japan's Assistive Device Grant System, for the reference of the countries of the Western Pacific region.

II. Overview of representative assistive product grant systems in Japan

Japan's representative assistive product grant systems include: the Assistive Device Grant System, benefit program for daily living equipment, benefit program under Long-Term Care Insurance, and benefit program under Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance. The Assistive Device Grant System and benefit program for daily living equipment are both administered under the General Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act. Under the Long-Term Care Insurance System, there are the Rental Service of Equipment for Long-Term Care Covered by Public Aid and Sale of Specified Equipment Covered by Public Aid systems, which are primarily intended for users aged 65 years and older. Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance covers workers who have been victims of workplace accidents.

What follows is an explanation of the Assistive Device Grant System, which is the most fundamental among these grant systems.

Grants for assistive devices were institutionalized in 1950, five years following the end of World War II, as part of the Act on Welfare of Physically Disabled Persons. This has since become a critical pillar of support for the independence and social participation of persons with disabilities.¹⁾ The current Assistive Device Grant System is considered as a benefit to support the independence of persons with disabilities within the General Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act, for the purpose of: "(1) guaranteeing the mobility and other activities necessary for persons with disabilities to navigate daily life

and improving their efficiency in the workplace and (2) fostering the character of children with disabilities to lead a self-reliant and independent life as members of society.”²⁾ The definition of Assistive Devices was also subject to review by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s Investigative Committee on the Reassessment of Assistive Devices (June 2005),³⁾ whereupon the Enforcement Regulations of the General Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act specified that an assistive device must meet all of the following criteria⁴⁾:

- a. It supplements or replaces the body functions and structures of persons with disabilities and was designed to adapt to his or her body;
- b. By being attached to the body of persons with disabilities, it is constantly used over a long period of time to accomplish everyday tasks in his or her daily life, for employment, or for education; and
- c. It is considered necessary according to the expert opinion of a doctor or a medical examination.

Grants for assistive devices are intended for adults (18 and older) or children (under 18 years) who have a certificate for persons with disabilities and are conferred by municipalities. Municipalities grant assistive devices based on the recommendations of their respective Recovery Consultation Office for Persons with Physical Disabilities (hereinafter referred to as “RCO”), which are established by prefectures and government ordinance-designated cities, and the criterion notified by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. RCOs offer specialized consultations and guidance for persons with physical disabilities.

Table 1 presents an overview of the types of assistive products provided. Parts that compose prostheses, orthoses, and comfort modular seating systems are designated and registered according to the evaluation of the Investigative Committee on the Assessment of Assistive Devices established by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. In addition to assessing assistive devices, this committee also deliberates on the base monetary amounts for these devices and other matters relating to the Assistive Devices Grant System. It is also possible to obtain a grant for assistive devices that are not indicated in the criterion (as “special assistive devices”) if they are deemed necessary by the RCO. Grants for repairing the products are also conferred based on the aforementioned criterion.

A rental system was introduced in FY2018, which allowed products to be rented, in addition to being purchased and repaired. However, a rental product must meet one of the following three criteria⁵⁾:

- a. The device is considered to be something that will have to be changed in the short term to accommodate physical growth;
- b. It is expected to only be used for a short period of time due to the progression of the impairment;
- c. It requires the user to compare multiple options before settling on a particular device.

The categories of products eligible for rental are: (1) parts for prostheses, orthoses, and comfort modular seating systems; and (2) support chairs, walkers, and assistive communication devices for persons with severe disabilities.

III. Process by which persons with physical disabilities can obtain assistive products

The process by which persons with physical disabilities can obtain assistive products starts with the person in question (hereinafter referred to as “the user”) applying for one at the City Hall in the municipality where they reside. In doing so, the user must personally get a written quote for the assistive devices they need and attach it to their application. The municipality that receives the application then submits the application to its RCO for review. Finally, the municipality decides whether to confer a grant for the assistive device based on the RCO’s response.

However, this would be cumbersome process for all assistive devices, so the Government formulated guidelines, which include the following three-stage operational method to maximize user convenience and facilitate the smooth operation of the Assistive Device Grant System: (1) Direct decision by the RCO; (2) Approval based on the written opinion of a doctor; and (3) Determination of necessity by the municipality. This is intended for the 17 categories indicated in Table 1, although wheelchairs are divided into ready-made and made-to-order, which makes 18 in total.

A. Devices whose necessity is determined by the municipality after a direct decision by the Recovery Consultation Office for Persons with Physical Disabilities (Fig. 1)

The devices whose necessity is determined by the municipality after a direct decision by the RCO are: prostheses, orthoses, comfort modular seating systems, and electric wheelchairs. The RCO has specialized staff to provide technical support, technical counsel, and information, such as welfare officers for persons with physical disabilities, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, prosthetists and orthotists, speech-language-hearing therapists, psychologists, specialists of vocational evaluation, case workers, public health nurses, and registered nurses. After conducting a one-on-one interview with the user and surveying his or her living environment and physical abilities, the assistive device is then reviewed by multiple experts to determine whether or not it is truly essential for the user and if there is a need to confer a grant for it. To get a direct decision, the user must make a reservation with the RCO and go there to be interviewed. Then, the municipality will decide whether or not to confer the grant for the assistive device after receiving the RCO’s written decision.

B. Devices whose necessity is determined by the municipality after a decision by the Recovery Consultation Office for Persons with Physical Disabilities based on a doctor’s opinion (Fig. 2)

The devices whose necessity is determined by the municipality after a decision by the RCO based on a doctor’s opinion are: hearing aids, made-to-order wheelchairs, and assistive communication devices for persons with severe disabilities. The user requests their doctor to write their opinion about a grant for the assistive device, which the user will then submit to the municipality during the application process. The municipality then

submits this written opinion to the RCO and awaits their decision on the grant. In this case, the user does not need to go directly to the RCO, and if all application documents are in order, the user will be contacted regarding the final decision on his or her grant.

C. Devices whose necessity is determined by the municipality based on a assistive device request form or a similar document (Fig. 3)

There are certain assistive devices whose necessity can be determined by the municipality through an assistive device request form or a similar document without requiring a decision from the RCO. These include artificial eyes, eyeglasses, ready-made wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, crutches, artificial cochleae, comfort modular chairs, standing frames, protective headgear, toileting aids, and all assistive devices for children with disabilities. A written opinion from a doctor for an assistive device grant is not often required in cases wherein the need is apparent. This is intended to simplify the application process and ease the burden on users.

While the municipality handles the decisions concerning the assistive device grants in these three aforementioned processes, there are also cases wherein it is difficult for the municipality to determine a device's eligibility according to Process B or C due to insufficient information. These cases might include highly individualized disorders or a device that is not currently included in the standard, but serves as a suitable assistive device (i.e., a "special assistive device") and in such cases, the necessity of a assistive device grant is determined through the direct decision of the RCO (Process A).

IV. Expenses incurred

Under the Assistive Device Grant System, there is a standard monetary amount allocated for each category, as shown in Table 1. The expenses incurred in the purchase and servicing of devices in the said categories are determined based on these standard amounts. Prostheses, orthoses, and comfort modular seating systems are assumed to be made individually by assembling their separate parts, so their total costs are calculated as the sum of the standard prices of all the parts, casting, and materials, etc.

Generally, Users are responsible for 10% of the expenses necessary for the purchase or servicing of an assistive device, with one-half of the remainder covered by the central government, one-fourth of it covered by their prefectural government, and one-fourth covered by their municipal government. There is a maximum monthly amount, which users are responsible for and this is based on their household income. However, if the income of a user (or a member of their household) falls below a certain level, then they are exempt from all expenses; conversely, if their income is above a certain level, then they are not eligible for an assistive device grant.

V. Other systems

A. Long-Term Care Insurance System

The Long-Term Care Insurance System is intended for those who have a Certification of Needed Long-Term Care (e.g., Persons Requiring Long-Term Care) and provides services related to Equipment for Long-Term Care (hereinafter referred to as

“ELC”) as part of their care plan. These ELC-related services under the Long-Term Care Insurance System are considered as in-home services and include the following:

- 1) Rental Service of Equipment for Long-Term Care Covered by Public Aid
- 2) Sale of Specified Equipment Covered by Public Aid
- 3) Home Modification

Preventive long-term care versions of the above services are available for Persons Requiring Support (“Need for Support” levels 1 and 2); that is, Rental Service of Equipment for Long-Term Care Prevention Covered by Public Aid, Sale of Specified Equipment for Long-Term Care Prevention Covered by Public Aid, and Home Modification for Preventing Long-Term Care.

As a rule, ELC is available for rent so that users can obtain it in a timely and adequate manner according to changes in their physical condition and the level of long-term care they need as well as to improve the overall functionality of ELC. “Sale of Specified Equipment Covered by Public Aid” program is allowed for purchases of certain items such as toileting and bathing aids, while “Home Modification” is allowed for relatively small-scale renovations, such as leveling the floor area and handrail installation, which become necessary when introducing ELC.

The categories of devices eligible for both ELC and Home Modification have been indicated in a public notice and interpretive bulletin published by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Table 2 presents the 13 categories specified under Rental Service of ELC Covered by Public Aid, while Table 3 shows the 5 categories specified under Sale of Specified Equipment Covered by Public Aid. The annual grant limit for Specified ELC purchases is set at ¥100 thousand (approximately US\$942) and the limit for Home Modification is ¥200 thousand (approximately US\$1,884) per house. Long-Term Care Insurance covers 70% to 90% of these amounts.

ELC rented and purchased under the Long-Term Care Insurance System are to be chosen from conventional ready-made products. However, the use of the Assistive Device Grant System or benefit program for daily living equipment may be considered if a doctor or a RCO deems it necessary to adapt the device to the individual circumstances of persons with disabilities.

B. Workers’ Accident Compensation Insurance

In Japan, even a business that hires just one worker is responsible for providing Workers’ Accident Compensation Insurance (hereinafter referred to as “workers’ compensation”). The workers’ compensation system has Social Rehabilitation Promotion Services, which seeks to support the return to work of workplace accident victims, and includes the provision of grants for the purchase and servicing of prostheses and other assistive devices. As a rule, the expenses subsidized by the grant are covered by the amount of the insurance premium for which the employer is responsible.

This is intended for workers who have sustained injuries or contracted illnesses due to work-related causes or commuting. Applications for prostheses or other assistive devices must be done at the Labour Bureau in the prefecture where the company that the user was working for when he or she was injured is located. As a rule, this subsequently acts as the point of contact for the user’s grant. Except for artificial cochleae, which are covered by the General Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act,

the categories of devices for whose purchase grants are conferred under the workers' compensation system include: myoelectric upper limb prostheses, braille writing equipment, artificial larynges, urine collectors, stoma orthoses, wigs, excretion agents with enemators, bedsore prevention mattresses (i.e., mats that can evenly distribute bodyweight), lifters for nursing care (including electrically-powered ones), flotation pads, and Gatch beds (i.e., beds and bed boards which enable the motorized/manual adjustment of one's body position). The production of a prosthesis, orthosis, comfort modular seating system, wheelchair, or electric wheelchair is carried out under the casting guidance of a trained and certified doctor registered with the Labour Bureau. Once the production of the device is complete, it is checked by the doctor for fitting before being given to the user.

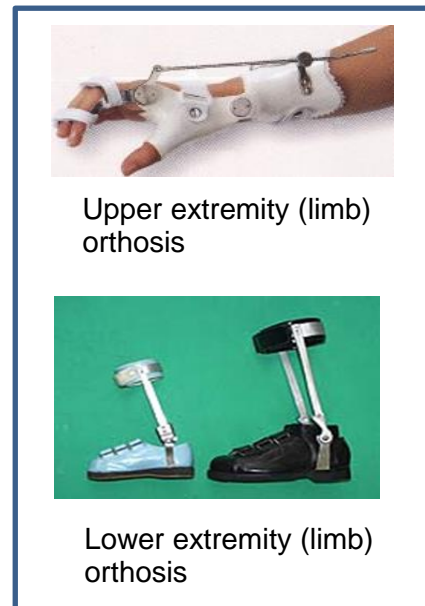
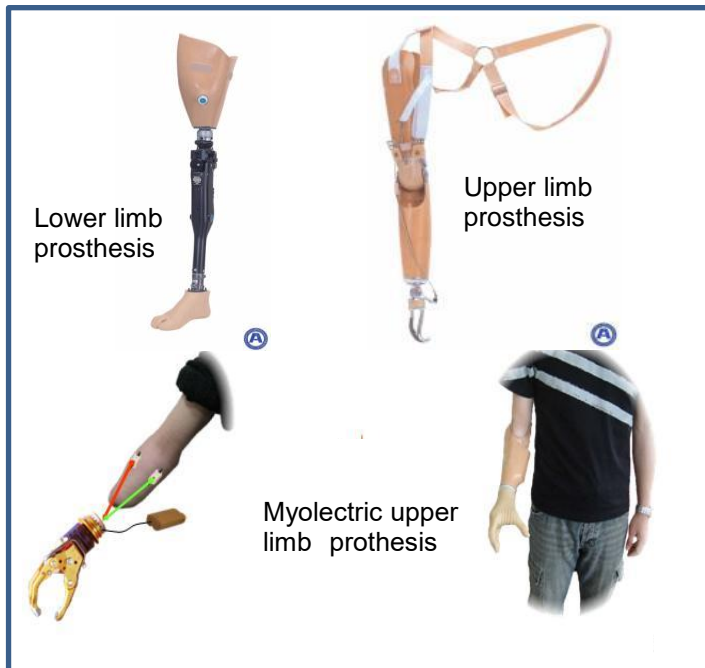
Not only are the expenses incurred by the prosthesis or other assistive device covered by Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance, so is a certain amount of the expenses incurred by the medical institution for casting guidance and fitting, in addition to the user's cost of transportation to the medical institution and the prosthetist/orthotist.

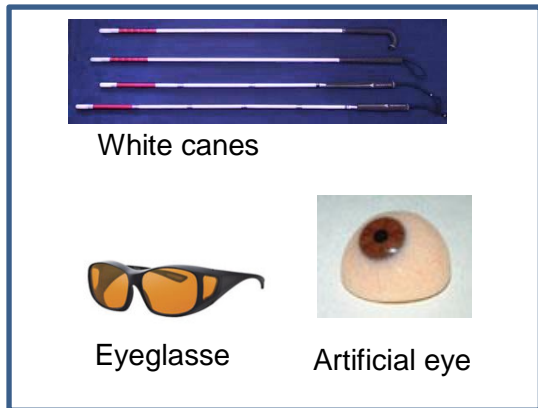
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- 3) *Gishi sōgu no yōgo kaisetsu* (Explanation of prosthetics and orthotics terminology), Department of Prosthetics and Orthotics at the National Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Disabilities, <http://www.rehab.go.jp/ri/hosougu/WORDS.html#w1>
- 4) Enforcement Regulations for the General Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act, article 6, clause 21
- 5) Enforcement Regulations for the General Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act, article 65, clause 7, paragraph 2

Table 1. Categories of assistive device grants

Categories	
Prostheses	Comfort modular chairs (for children's use)
Orthoses	Standing frames (for children's use)
Comfort modular seating system	Walkers
White canes	Protective headgear (for children's use)
Artificial eyes	Toileting aids (for children's use)
Eyeglasses	Crutches
Hearing aids	Assistive communication devices for persons with severe disabilities
Wheelchairs	Artificial cochleae (for servicing only)
Electric wheelchairs	





Assistive communication device for persons with severe disabilities



Assistive devices for children with disabilities



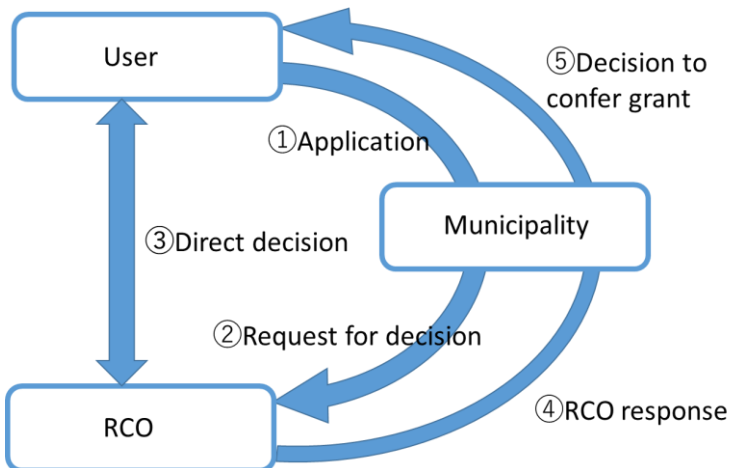


Fig. 1. Process whereby the municipality determines a device's necessity after the Recovery Consultation Office for Persons with Physical Disabilities gives a direct decision

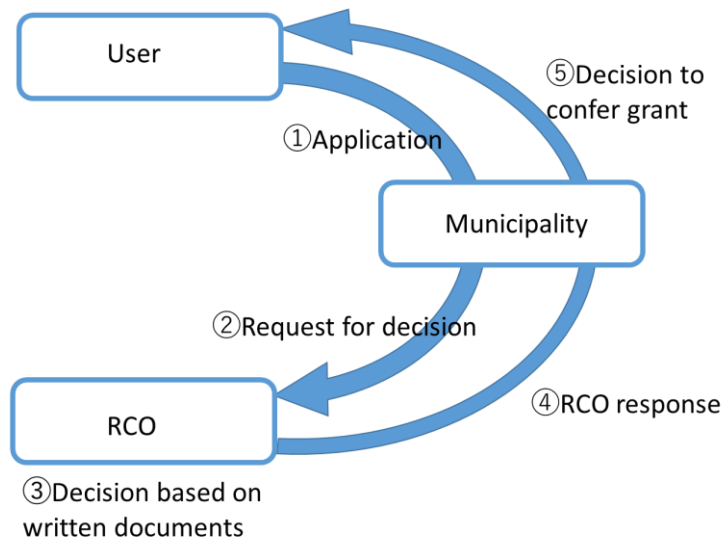


Fig. 2. Process whereby the municipality determines a device's necessity after the Recovery Consultation Office for Persons with Physical Disabilities gives a decision based on a doctor's written opinion

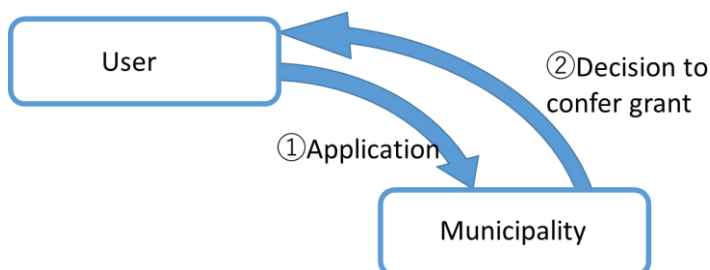


Fig. 3. Process whereby the municipality determines a device's necessity based on a assistive device request form or a similar document

Table 2. Categories of devices specified under Rental Service of ELC Covered by Public Aid in the Long-Term Care Insurance System

1. Wheelchairs	8. Wheelchair ramps
2. Wheelchair fittings	9. Walkers
3. Special beds	10. Assistive canes
4. Accessories for special beds	11. Locator devices for dementia patients
5. Anti-slip equipment	12. Transport lifts (excluding the sling parts)
6. Body position adjusters	13. Automatic excretion processing devices
7. Handrails	

Table 3. Categories of devices specified under Sale of Specified Equipment Covered by Public Aid in the Long-Term Care Insurance System

1. Portable toilets	4. Standard bathtubs
2. Interchangeable parts of automatic excretion processing devices	5. Sling parts for transport lifts
3. Bathing aids	