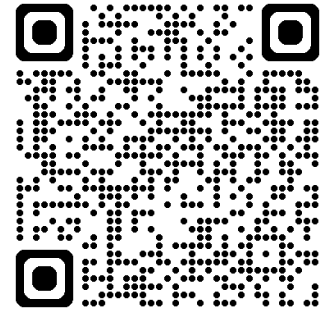


Aging societies drive wheelchair innovation in Japan



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20250805164107277/>

The World Health Organization says an estimated 80 million people worldwide are in need of a wheelchair and the number will increase as societies rapidly age. Japanese companies are responding with innovative models based on feedback from users.

The 2025 World Expo in Osaka is underway. A Japanese company developed a wheelchair to better help people move around the venue and 23 are available on site.

I have a sore knee so I borrowed this.

It feels much safer in the wheelchair instead of walking.

The maker says the key characteristic is the compact size which makes it easy to carry. The wheelchair is 54 centimeters wide or 6 centimeters narrower than standard models in Japan. This allows users to pass through regular ticket gates at train stations. It has other benefits.

By folding the footrests like this, I can get close to the wash basin without any trouble.

We saw the need and created a wheelchair that is light weight, compact, and easy to use even in the home. We hope to see it in further use in the future.

A start-up from Tsukuba University is working on a new kind of wheelchair that allows a user to stand up and move. This innovation opens the possibility for users to get to kitchen shelves previously out of reach,

wash a car roof, or even play basketball. Co-founder Eguchi Yosuke, a graduate of the University, has studied biomechanics since his undergraduate days. The model's key feature is a gas spring. It pushes up to help the knees straighten and reduces the need for leg strength. Users can stand up by leaning forward to shift weight. Tests are underway at university hospitals with a commercial release planned for next fiscal year. 5 wheelchair users came to try it out. The users can stand and start moving. It opened up a world of sites that have long been out of reach.

We want people to see further, walk next to others at eye level, and enjoy everyday life. We aim to build a wheelchair that brings real happiness.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. What is your opinion of these new wheelchair designs? Do you think they will be widely used in the future? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of any other areas in daily life where technology could be improved to help people with physical challenges?
3. How do you think a wheelchair that allows someone to stand might change the way they interact with others?
4. Have you ever seen or used a tool or device that made life easier for someone with a disability? What was it?
5. Why do you think user feedback is important when designing devices like these?