



## **Project: Create Global Network to Improve Lives of Wheelchair Users**

Of the nearly 70 million people worldwide who require wheelchairs for mobility and function, most lack access to appropriate wheelchairs or services to fix them. Now, a handful of University of Pittsburgh



International Society  
of Wheelchair Professionals

scientists are working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under a 2-year, \$2.3 million sub-award to develop the new [International Society of Wheelchair Professionals](#), a global network to teach and professionalize device repair, build affiliations to put better equipment in the right hands, and ensure a level of standardization, certification, and oversight.

Starting in January, the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals will be launched and administered by faculty members from the Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. Assistant professors Jon Pearlman, Ph.D., associate director of engineering at the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), and [Rory Cooper, Ph.D.](#), HERL founding director and Distinguished Professor of Rehabilitation Science and Technology, will serve as co-directors. Dr. Cooper is also a McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine affiliated faculty member.

The organizers intend to create three areas critical to this international network, as outlined in the funding:

- train people to build capacity for wheelchair service providers around the world
- develop international wheelchair standards
- initiate a broad advocacy and outreach campaign to recruit affiliates on every continent

“For at least the last 30 years, there has been a need for an international society to help improve the quality of wheelchairs, service delivery, and repair as well,” Dr. Cooper said, “and to link consumers, designers, manufacturers, rehabilitation professionals, and wheelchair users so that we can all communicate. A rising tide raises all boats, so let’s raise the level for everybody in the world.”

Added Dr. Pearlman: “USAID is part of the federal Department of State, and it tries to spread the mission of the United States internationally. In this case, it’s a grant to the University of Pittsburgh, but to build a network and an ability to professionalize services around the world to contribute to this common goal – which is to improve the lives of wheelchair users.”



Since 2002, USAID has granted more than \$45 million to improve wheelchairs and wheelchair services worldwide. This sub-award – Agreement No. APC-GM-0068 – was presented by Advancing Partners & Communities, a 5-year cooperative agreement funded by USAID under Agreement No. AIDOAA-A-12-00047, beginning Oct. 1, 2012.

Illustration: International Society of Wheelchair Professionals.

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