

Accessible transportation Consultation:

I would like to provide the following feedback in my role as clinical Practice Lead (Occupational Therapy) on the many challenges Canadian children and their families face in accessing equitable air travel when travelling with a child with a disability.

Many families at Erinoakkids Centre for Treatment and Development request information on a regular basis from clinicians asking for advice on air travel with their child. The majority of families we support have a child who has a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, spina bifida or other complex medical condition, and frequently require customized seating and mobility systems for transport.

In my research conducted in identifying available supports to families considering air travel for a child with a disability, I discovered that in Canada we are significantly under resourced in providing equitable access to air travel for both children and adults with disabilities.

For the purpose of this consultation, the focus of my feedback will concentrate on the needs of children with disabilities.

I would like to raise awareness regarding issues that relate to Air Transportation Regulation (ATR) Part VII. Terms and Conditions of Carriage of Persons (With Disabilities) ensure that air carriers provide uniform services to passengers with disabilities, travelling in Canada on aircraft with 30 or more passenger seats.

At this time Canadian carriers only offer limited options in regard to child restraint device that meet FAA approval. One of these options is the CARE child restraint device designed for children that are capable of sitting upright. This restraint device does not offer any head support, lateral supports or foot support, and reviews of this product have been varied with reports of the shoulder straps providing little support to help a child maintain optimal positioning during a flight. For many Canadian children who have a neuro-developmental diagnosis the CARE device does not offer sufficient support to maintain an upright position, so even though the child is able to transfer from his/her wheelchair to another chair with adult support in "an effective and sensitive fashion" the CARE device is not sufficient to support an upright sitting position. Thus, equitable and accessible seating is only offered to children that can already maintain an upright position and not available to many children and families who need additional supports.

In researching available products that are currently being trialed or used by airlines that travel to and from Canada, but are not regulated under the Canadian transportation agency, I discovered that there are several products that are being used by other airlines e.g. Virgin Airlines and British Airways. I would like to bring the following products to your attention.

1. MERU TravelChair <http://meru.org.uk/what-we-do/travelchair/>

The TravelChair fits into a standard airline seat giving firm, postural support for disabled children whilst they travel by air. It is suitable for disabled children from 3 – 11 years (depending on their size and weight). It offers an adjustable headrest, footrest and body harness that provides various levels of postural support which can allow even severely disabled children the option to fly. The chair is made from durable materials and was developed in collaboration with the parents of disabled children, airlines and the UK Civil Aviation Authority to ensure everyone's needs are met. It is now approved by EASA. The TravelChair can be placed in a standard airline seat so you can sit with your child during the flight. It is quick to install, and fits into the overhead locker when not in use. I have connected with the senior Team at MERU who advised me that this chair can now be used during air travel in the US, when

an exemption certificate is applied for on behalf of the user. Please refer to additional link for information

<http://www.virgin-atlantic.com/gb/en/travel-information/special-assistance/mobility-impaired/support-seating.htm>

2. Crelling harness

The Crelling Harness is a supportive chest and/or waistband with shoulder straps that keep the passenger upright. The harness also helps prevent involuntary movements. Only Crelling Model 27 is accepted for use onboard Virgin Airline. Type 27I is for children up to 5 years, Type 27A for 5-8 years and Type 27B for 9 years to adult. The Crelling Harness can be fitted to any aircraft seat, except aisle seats, bulk head seats and those on emergency exit rows. Note that Virgin cabin crew are not trained to use the harness, so may not be able to help fit it.

3. Burnett body support

The Burnett Body Support – for passengers aged approx. 12 and above. The Burnett Body Support is a sheepskin-covered beanbag with full back support, a headrest and two side arms. A member of the cabin crew can use a foot pump to remove the air from inside the bag, allowing it to mould itself around the passenger for optimal support.

See link for Crelling and Burnett body support

<http://www.virgin-atlantic.com/gb/en/travel-information/special-assistance/mobility-impaired/support-seating.html>

I would also like to draw attention to the Try Before you Fly service - www.tryb4ufly.org.uk offered in the UK. This service is currently not offered/available in Canada (a service similar to this would be great for Canadian families considering air travel with their child). The service helps families to work through how they will fly, and reduce anxiety in anticipation of the upcoming flight. This service uses simulated sections of a fuselage, with the equipment/products that can be used on the plane so that parents and their team can try things out before they fly. The assessments are undertaken by Occupational Therapists who assess the most optimal location for the child to sit on the plane, they also complete a practice transfer and make individual recommendations for products that families can rent (airlines do not provide equipment for families, instead families can rent products from designated vendors which can be returned post flight).

An additional area of challenge identified for families travelling with a child with a disability is that the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) no longer crash test specialized car seats in Canada for children with disabilities, and as "child restraint devices manufactured in Canada after January 1st 1981: must bear a label stating that "this child restraint system conforms to all applicable Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standards" this leaves families with limited options for accessible air travel. With no crash testing being currently offered by the CTA for car seats, there needs to be an alternative route that families can defer to in order to address this issue.

It is my hope that feedback provided within this consultation can support positive change in the existing voluntary codes and standards, and allow for a general widening in terms of available resources that can be approved to support children (and adults) during air travel.

I would be happy to further discuss any of the concerns outlined above, please see my contact information below. I am hopeful that this opportunity for consultation with the Accessible transportation Consultation and Canadians such as myself will help define best practice in the airline industry when supporting individuals with disabilities.

Your sincerely,

Anne Cooper-Worsnop