

Due to mobility restrictions directly linked to age my husband now requires the use of a wheelchair. We have experienced and have become aware of unjustified barriers and obstacles that affect seniors and passengers with disabilities at Pearson International Airport and when traveling with Air Canada.

It was suggested by the Hon., Marc Garneau's office that it would be extremely helpful if I would share our insight and information to assist in your decision-making process for developing regulations and standards for the establishment of a bill of rights for the air traveller. I was advised that these regulations and standards resulting in a bill of rights once implemented would ensure that positive changes are implemented for the treatment of all air travellers.

It is our expectation that the end result will include the expansion of services at Pearson airport and by Air Canada for a barrier-free coordinated approach that addresses the physical and psychological issues to meet the needs of elderly travellers and also for people with disabilities.

Both my husband and I have travelled extensively in various parts of the world. My husband worked for a major airline and operated international flights. During his work life in Canada my husband worked for a period with General Aviation at Pearson Airport in Toronto. His duties included Check-Ins, Arrivals, Departures, Lost Baggage together with issues to address the needs of clients using wheelchairs. Input was also obtained from family and friends (i.e., global travellers, international flight operations staff, manager international airport operations).

Singapore Airlines for years is said to be the very best for the range of customer services and quality of food they provide. I can vouch for it as we have travelled on this airline. It is time for Canadians to take pride in their National Airline and about the services provided at every step of the journey when traveling by air.

As you know the aging population which now includes the baby boom generation is rapidly increasing. Travel by air is frequently compromised by age and disabilities. This becomes even more of a challenge when dealing with physical and social environments at airports and while on the plane which have unjustified barriers and obstacles.

It is often devastating for seniors and travellers with disabilities seniors when dealing with challenges due to the unavailability of accessible barrier-free air travel. As a result, they may decide not to travel by air again or find alternate modes of travel or use another airline instead of Air Canada to fly to their destination.

Provision of accessible barrier-free air travel will open it to millions of people in this segment of the market with disposable income that need the use of airlines to fly to local and global

destinations. It will also provide a competitive advantage to the Canadian tourism industry for attracting this target market niche that is rapidly growing.

The following information which focuses on Pearson Airport Terminal 1 and Air Canada is provided with the intention of assisting your committee in their deliberations.

1. *Stress-Free process prior to booking the flight In Canada for seniors and people with disabilities:*

Every stage of the air travel process for senior citizens and travellers with disabilities requires careful attention to detail and greater pre-planning time to avoid stress, ensure safety and dignity.

It would assist seniors and individuals with disabilities to have a stress-free segregated booking procedure in place at the stage when they are planning to travel by air such as:

- A website that provides a complete list of available resources in Canada that addresses the needs and concerns for their safety and comfort when travelling by air.
- “Designated Special Assistance Services staff” with the expertise and ability to effectively address communication barriers. To provide accurate information about available service offerings and about the journey when travelling with Air Canada (i.e., from booking their ticket, arrival at the airport to embarking and disembarking their flight on reaching their destination).
- Once the flight is booked the special assistance staff should electronically send passenger requests and accommodation needs to the required service areas to ensure smooth coordination of services.

2. *Wheelchair Services On Arrival at the Airport:*

At Pearson Airport getting to the “Check in Counter” often requires walking long distances.

- It would be helpful to have directional signage for wheelchair locations at the airport.
- a. ***Accompanied Passengers:***
- This will enable passengers accompanied by someone, who is able to take them in a wheelchair from curbside to the Check-In Counter.
- b. ***Travellers pre-registered on the Air Canada website that require curbside wheelchair services to take them to the Air Canada Counter.***
- Establish a process for the traveller needing wheelchair services to be taken from curbside to the “Check in Counter” (i.e., passengers with disabilities traveling on their own or with a senior citizen i.e., unable to assist).
- c. ***Check-In counter staff should be instructed to provide passengers registered for wheelchair services with the following information:***

- o Location of wheelchair services.
 - o That they must register their names at the wheelchair services counter.
 - o Have their boarding pass handy to show the wheelchair desk staff so they can verify their request.
- d. ***Wheelchair Services Counter, Pearson Airport Departures Area:***
- o A staff member must be at the wheelchair counter to register clients (desk is often not managed as attendants are busy taking wheelchair clients).
 - o Passengers should be informed about the process they will be taken - i.e., either in the sequence of when they are registered. OR according to time of departure.
 - o Advise passengers that they should identify themselves when their names are called out so that the wheelchair attendant can take them to the departure gate.
- e. ***Communication Training for Wheelchair Attendants:***
- o Some wheelchair attendants need training about how to communicate and deal with passengers with disabilities e.g., hearing and vision impaired, language barrier or seniors who take time processing information.
- f. ***Wheelchair services offered by Air Canada need major improvements:***
- o Adequate wheelchairs and ground staff are required to handle the volume of passengers that require wheelchairs.
 - o The need for these services is growing.
 - o Additional staff and wheelchairs should be assigned during busy travel periods e.g. Religious holidays (Easter, Passover, Christmas) Summer and Winter Breaks.
 - o As a direct result of the volume of passengers waiting for wheelchair services, seating is unavailable in the wheelchair service waiting area.
 - o Long delays for wheelchairs and at multiple wheelchair waiting areas causes anxiety, stress and discomfort for disabled passengers.
 - o *Flight Departures:* After check-in it would help to have the same wheelchair attendant take the passenger directly through security, customs and to the departure gate.
 - o *Flight Arrivals:* ensure timely pick of passengers requiring wheelchairs after they deplane and same wheelchair attendant take the passenger directly through customs to baggage claims and to the curb.
 - o Hardworking airline ground crew have to deal with the anger and frustration of passengers due to lack of staff and wheelchairs.
 - o Safety hazards without escort are a risk and includes significant liability when the requested wheelchair service is not provided.
 - o Arbitration and mediation processes costs the airline time and money.

3. *Lack of available Golf Cart Services and Safety Issues :*

a. *Lack of golf carts*

- Air Canada ground staff has difficulty getting golf carts for passengers in wheelchairs after they are brought from the plane as the golf cart operation is managed by an external company.

b. *Safety and Liability issues:*

- There is no protection for passengers with disabilities sitting at the very back of the golf cart when there are unexpected stops.
- Issue-Golf Cart stops and these passengers assume they have reached their destination. When the Golf cart starts to move again without the passengers' knowledge it has resulted in their baggage and canes falling off the cart and the passenger attempting to get off could get injured.
Below are two incidents where I was able to alert the driver so the passenger did not get injured
 - Driver stopped to clock in arrival at reporting station.
 - Driver stopped to talk to Air Canada ground staff requesting him to call the Golf Cart Service Station as golf carts were not being sent for passengers with mobility issues).

4. *Issues for passengers with disabilities in aircraft cabins during the flight:*

- Seniors who may require frequent use of the lavatory including passengers in wheelchairs or on crutches need easy access to the lavatory; they also need to be seated closer to the entrance door of the plane.
- Seats close to front row and also the aisle seats for easy access are required.
- When booking online or calling Air Canada Staff booking staff far in advance of the trip these seats appear to be blocked off by Air Canada. However, we did not have a problem getting these seats when booking through a Travel Agency!!
- Cabin staff must announce that deplaning passengers requiring wheelchair services are required to wait at the bottom of the ramp for the wheelchair attendant to pick them up and take them to the next stage of their journey.

5. *Security Lanes:*

- Seniors and passengers in wheelchairs struggle with security lines.

- It would help to make this part of the journey easier if there was a designated separate lane as well as an established process for situations where expedited security clearance is necessary.
- It may avoid them from forgetting their carry-on luggage or taking another passengers luggage in error.
- Delays for other passengers while these individuals struggle to remove their shoes, belts etc.,

6. *Other issues:*

Challenges due to difficulties due to the design and development of services and facilities related to airline travel.

It is extremely difficult for seniors to wheel their luggage for long distances on carpeted floors at Pearson Airport.

- Passengers with disabilities in wheelchairs struggle to get-up for the Nexus computer system IRIS SCAN. It would be helpful to have the IRIS Scan at the wheelchair level.
- Infrastructure issues such as the lack of accessible toilets close to the gate when boarding and disembarking the plane.
- Lack of proper design at Pearson airport at some of arrival and departure gates where there is a steep and narrow ramp. The issues with these types of ramps means
 - ❖ that it allows only one wheelchair with a cumbersome electronic attachment to come up and down for one disabled passenger to be taken at a time.
 - ❖ This is extremely difficult and exhausting for the wheelchair attendant who has to operate it.
 - ❖ Extremely difficult for passengers with disabilities to stand for long periods as no seating is available After deplaning the.