

AAF

Aviation Access Forum

Carriage of Mobility Aids

Guidance Material for Passengers

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Carriage of Mobility Aids - Guide for Passengers

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to passengers travelling with mobility aids by air. This document is not intended to be legally binding on airline and airport operators.

You can use this document to find out information relating to travelling by air with mobility aids, including what you can do to ensure your journey runs smoothly from start to finish, and should be read in conjunction with information available from airlines or airports. When in doubt, please contact the airline or airport customer service center or refer to the airline or airport's Disability Access Facilitation Plan (DAFP) on their website.

In Australia, all airline and airport operators must comply with aviation safety legislation, namely the *Civil Aviation Act 1988*, the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998 and the Civil Aviation Regulations 1988. These requirements ensure the Australian aviation industry is safe and compliant with international safety standards and they can impact on the travel arrangements of passengers with disability.

Airline and airport operators are also obligated under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (DSAPT) to not unlawfully discriminate against passengers with disability in providing public transport services.

There are also provisions in the DDA and the Transport Standards that mean that certain conduct by airline and airport operators does not constitute unlawful discrimination – including, amongst other things, the reasonableness and the unjustifiable hardship 'defences' and the provision of equivalent access and direct assistance.

This document provides guidance to passengers travelling with mobility aids and is not intended to be binding on airline or airport operators.

Definitions

The DDA broadly defines 'Disability aid' as equipment that is used by a person with disability and provides assistance to alleviate the effect of a disability. A disability aid may be a palliative or therapeutic device.

'Mobility aids' are considered to be devices designed to assist walking or otherwise improve the mobility of people with a mobility impairment. Examples include walking aids (walking sticks, crutches and frames), manual or electric wheelchairs, and electric mobility scooters.

2. Planning Your Travel – Sources of Information

Airline and airport operators provide a range of information to assist people with disability, including information about airport facilities and services, and flight requirements and limitations.

The number and size of mobility aids that can be carried may differ between aircraft types

and airlines, so always check with your airline before booking.

You can obtain this information through a number of mediums, such as:

- electronically, via email or through airline and airport websites;
- through information provided during the booking process;
- by telephone, including a comparable information service for people with hearing impairment;
- in person at airline customer service counters; and
- in DAFPs, published on airline and airport websites.

3. Booking Your Flight

3.1 Advance Notification Requirements

Passengers with disability who intend to travel with mobility aids should provide the airline with at least 48 hours advance notice. When booking your flight, always specify that you will require assistance when you travel.

When notifying the airline that you require assistance when travelling, you may be asked to provide the following information:

- number of mobility aids;
- type of mobility aid;
- size dimensions of mobility aid;
- weight of mobility aid;
- type of battery, if battery-powered;
- whether the aid is collapsible or foldable; and
- any arrangements that will be required whilst without mobility aid.

If less than 48 hours' notice is provided, airline staff may not be able to accommodate your mobility aid or fully assist you. This advance notice also provides the airline with time to advise you of any necessary changes or where alternative arrangements need to be made.

It is important that when you are travelling with more than one airline you make separate arrangements with each airline.

You should confirm specific procedures and requirements for transporting batteries and electrical devices which accompany mobility aids through the airline's DAFP or by contacting the airline's customer service team and confirm these at the time of booking.

3.2 Passengers Requiring Wheelchair Assistance

The majority of Australia's domestic airlines have adopted a flexible approach to the carriage of passengers requiring wheelchair assistance on a flight and will generally carry

multiple passengers requiring wheelchair assistance on a particular flight, wherever possible.

However, there may be limits to the number of passengers requiring wheelchair assistance which an airline can carry on a particular flight depending on operational and safety requirements.

Factors which may be taken into consideration by airlines in determining the number of passengers requiring wheelchair assistance that can be carried on a particular flight may include, without limitation:

- the extent of a passenger's disability and the level of assistance to be provided by the airline;
- whether a passenger is travelling with a personal wheelchair to be loaded into the aircraft;
- the size and weight of a passenger's personal wheelchair (as small manual foldable wheelchairs will be easier to load and unload compared to electric wheelchairs and scooters, which may also be accompanied by a spare battery that will need dangerous goods approval or may exceed the size and weight restrictions of the aircraft);
- the nature of assistance required for passengers already booked on the flight;
- the airport infrastructure available at the departure and arrival airports; and
- the type of aircraft allocated to a passenger's preferred flight, including the capacity of the cargo hold and any aircraft weight limitations.

Airlines may also consider other factors relevant to their operation in determining the carriage of passengers (such as operational and safety considerations). You should refer to the relevant airline's Disability Access Facilitation Plan and other information on their website for details on an airline's specific arrangements and requirements.

You should advise airlines of your assistance requirements as early as possible to ensure your needs are appropriately addressed on the day of travel (to the extent possible) and the airline should advise you as early as possible, ideally at the booking stage, if you are unable to take your preferred flight due to a limit on the number of passengers requiring wheelchair assistance.

Where circumstances necessitate that you are no longer able to travel on a particular flight the airline should contact you as soon as possible to try to arrange suitable and timely alternative travel arrangements.

3.3 Dangerous Goods Approval Requirements for Portable Power Supplies

Passengers travelling with battery-powered mobility aids should notify the airline at least 48 hours in advance as approval may need to be obtained from the airline.

This ensures airlines are able to safely carry your mobility aid and meet any aviation safety requirements regarding the correct carriage of batteries.

The procedures followed by the airline are dependent on the type of battery fitted to your mobility aid and the ability to load, stow and unload the mobility aid in the upright position and in freewheel mode through the aircraft cargo compartment doors to the anchor point in the cargo hold. In some cases, these requirements may not allow battery powered mobility aids to be carried onboard smaller aircraft or may limit the number of battery powered mobility aids that can be carried.

You should confirm specific procedures and requirements for transporting batteries and electrical devices which accompany mobility aids through the airline's DAFP or by contacting the airline's customer service team and confirming these at the time of booking.

In obtaining an approval to travel with a particular device, you may be required to obtain further information from the battery manufacturer to ensure it is safe to be transported by air. You should also be prepared to show documentation to confirm the specifications of the device you are travelling with when checking in at the airport.

4. Arrival at the Airport

There are likely to be arrangements in place at the airport to assist with accessibility to the airport terminal, including accessible set-down and pick-up areas, accessible ramps and pathways, and accessible car parking.

Passengers should be aware that assistance is not always available outside the airport terminal building. However, some airline and airport operators may be able provide assistance if arranged in advance.

You should consult both the airline's and airport's DAFPs to confirm kerb side arrangements and whether assistance can be arranged for your arrival at the airport and confirm these at the time of booking. You should also consider your own specific needs and whether you will need to ask someone (e.g. a family member, friend or driver) to escort you to the airport and/or you may choose to travel with an assistant or carer who can assist if required.

5. Check-In at the Airport

You may need additional time to check-in, move through security and immigration processes, and have your mobility aid loaded onto the aircraft if required. You should confirm check-in and boarding times when booking your travel, as well as through the airline's DAFP or by contacting the airline's customer service team.

When travelling with a mobility aid, you should make yourself known to airline customer service staff upon your arrival at the check-in area. Airline staff can assist you with the check-in process and will confirm your assistance requirements, including arrangements for handing over your mobility aid to airline staff prior to boarding, either at check-in or at the departure gate, and retrieval upon arriving at your destination.

In circumstances where you will have a significant period of time between connecting

flights, you should discuss this with the airline when checking-in to determine if your mobility aid can be returned for the period of time between flights.

5.1 Allowance of Mobility Aid Items

Passengers with disability are generally able to carry up to two mobility aids in addition to airline baggage allowances at no extra cost. However, this may not always be possible and will depend on the operational limitations of the aircraft.

You should confirm an airline's requirements and any costs for transporting additional mobility aids through the airline's DAFP or by contacting the airline's customer service team as well as at the time of booking.

5.2 Handing Over of Mobility Aids to Airline Staff at check-in

Passengers with disability travelling with mobility aids are generally required to check-in electric mobility aids with any other checked baggage. Checking-in your mobility aid allows airline ground staff to disassemble the mobility aid if necessary and prepare any electrical components for safe transportation in the aircraft cargo hold.

Airline staff will assist you to transfer to an airline supplied wheelchair and transit through to the departure area if required. If self-propelled wheelchairs are not available, airline staff can provide you with assistance to move throughout the terminal.

Provisions for checking-in mobility aids vary with respect to airport facilities and airline operational restrictions. It is strongly recommended that you either consult the airline's DAFP or contact the airline's customer service team to confirm if your mobility aid will need to be checked-in and what assistance will be arranged for you. These arrangements should also be confirmed with the airline at time of booking.

6. Security Screening at the Airport

By law, all passengers, baggage and cargo departing on regular passenger services, and any other flight departing from the same apron during an aircraft's operational period, must undergo security screening using an x-ray or explosive trace detection test before boarding the plane. This includes mobility aids such as walking aids and wheelchairs (including airline supplied wheelchairs). The designated screening authority must ensure that seating and walking aids are available at screening points to assist passengers whilst their mobility aid is being screened.

Passenger screening may include walk through metal detectors and body scanners. If you are not independently mobile or unable to stand still with your hands raised above your head for the body scanner, you will be screened in a way best suited to you using any of the following methods:

- x-ray equipment;
- explosive trace detection tests;
- metal detection equipment; or

- private physical search.

Training provided to security screening officers is designed to ensure everyone is treated fairly and with respect when going through security screening at the airport.

Further information on airport security screening for passengers with disability can be found on the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development's website at www.travelsecure.infrastructure.gov.au/specific-needs/

It is also recommended that you either consult the airport's DAFP or contact the airport directly for further information on an airport's security screening processes.

7. Boarding the Aircraft

7.1 Mobility Aid Size and Weight Requirements for Carriage in the Aircraft Cabin

Generally, walking aids and collapsible devices can be carried in the aircraft cabin, including:

- canes;
- crutches;
- collapsible walking frames; and
- prosthetic devices.

Airline staff can assist you to store and retrieve mobility aids that are stored in the aircraft cabin if required.

In order to be carried in the aircraft cabin, these items will need to meet the same size and weight requirements as carry-on baggage. This ensures they will be able to fit in overhead storage compartments or on the floor underneath seats. Size and weight requirements can vary from flight to flight due to different aircraft sizes and types.

Passengers can confirm size and weight requirements for carrying mobility aids in the aircraft cabin through the airline's DAFP or by contacting the airline's customer service team and you should confirm these requirements at the time of booking.

Please note that walking aids and collapsible devices will also be stored in the aircraft cargo hold when they exceed an aircraft's size and weight requirements or when there is insufficient space to store them safely in the aircraft cabin.

7.2 Check-in of Mobility Aids at the Time of Boarding

In general, passengers are able to use manual wheelchairs and other types of non-collapsible mobility aids (other than electric wheelchairs) up to the departure gate of a terminal building. In some cases, your mobility aid must be collected at the check-in area. At the point of transfer from your mobility aid, you will be assisted by airline staff, if required, to transfer to an aisle-wheelchair supplied by the airline. Your mobility aid will then be collected by airline ground staff to be loaded into the aircraft cargo hold.

Walking aids and other devices may also be collected from you at this point if there is

insufficient space or it is unsafe to stow them in the cabin.

A number of airlines also make available lifting equipment to assist passengers with disability board the aircraft at some airports. You should discuss with the airline at the time of booking the availability of this equipment on your particular flight and the suitability of any available equipment for your specific needs.

7.3 Mobility Aid Size and Weight Requirements for Carriage in the Aircraft Cargo Hold

The operational requirements of aircraft require that wheelchairs and mobility scooters be stored in the aircraft cargo hold as there is insufficient space to store them safely in the aircraft cabin. Walking aids and collapsible devices will also be stored in the aircraft cargo hold when they exceed an aircraft's size and weight requirements or when there is insufficient space to store them safely in the aircraft cabin.

Size and weight requirements for cargo storage can vary between flights due to different cargo door dimensions and safe weight capacity of different aircraft types. Airlines are also required to adhere to safety legislation which may place additional constraints on weight and size requirements. You should consult the airline's DAFP or contact the airline's customer service team to confirm size and weight requirements for carrying mobility aids in the aircraft cargo hold and confirm these arrangements at the time of booking.

The number of mobility aids that can be carried on an aircraft is dependent on the space, size and weight requirements of the aircraft. These limitations may impact your ability to travel on a particular flight. When booking your travel, you should advise the airline of your requirements to ensure the airline is able to book you on a flight that meets your needs.

Where circumstances necessitate that you are not able to travel on a particular flight, the airline should contact you as soon as possible to make alternative travel arrangements with you.

7.4 Assembly and Disassembly of Mobility Aids

Some mobility aids may need to be disassembled in order to be transported, therefore you should always ensure that all components of your mobility aid are clearly labelled and identifiable. To assist airline ground staff to prepare mobility aids for transportation appropriately, you may need to provide airline ground staff with assistance and instructions on how to assemble and disassemble your mobility aid.

While an airline should take all reasonable steps to ensure that your mobility aid is handled with care and returned to you in the condition it was received, an airline's liability for damaged or lost property is limited and subject to provisions of the *Civil Aviation (Carriers' Liability) Act 1959*.

You may wish to consider purchasing travel or general equipment insurance to ensure you are adequately compensated in the event of damage or loss.

The airline's conditions of carriage will include what the airline will be liable for and you should discuss any concerns you have regarding the carriage of your mobility aid at the time of booking as well as with airline staff at check-in and when handing over your mobility aid.

7.5 Access to Mobility Aids between Connecting Flights

When there is a significant period of time between connecting flights, you may request that your mobility aid be returned to you. If this is not possible the airline should discuss with you, alternative arrangements to ensure you are able to access and utilise the facilities at the terminal while awaiting your next flight.

8. Disembarking the Aircraft

In circumstances where it has not been possible to travel with your mobility aid in the aircraft cabin, airline ground crew will assist you to disembark the aircraft. This assistance may be through a high lift vehicle, when available, or by providing an airline supplied wheelchair.

Once you have disembarked the aircraft, airline staff should assist you until your mobility aid is returned (either at the gate or baggage collection area).

You should discuss any needs you may have at the time of disembarkation when making your booking as well as with airline staff when you check-in for your flight.

9. Retrieval of Baggage and Mobility Aids

In some cases, mobility aids may be collected at the gate (upon entering the airport terminal) after disembarking. You should confirm arrangements for collecting your mobility aid when checking-in for your flight.

Where airport infrastructure or airline operational arrangements do not allow for collection at the gate, the mobility aid will be taken to the oversize baggage collection area. In this situation, airline staff should assist you to the baggage carousel to assist you with the collection of your baggage and mobility aid, and with the transfer to your mobility aid, if available and if required.

You should advise airline staff that you will need assistance to retrieve any mobility aids stored in the aircraft cabin. There may be a delay in provision of assistance while airline staff undertake other duties (e.g. safety-related matters).

10. Carers

If you are travelling with a mobility aid, you may not need to travel with an assistant or carer. However, some passengers may not meet the requirements for travelling alone without an assistant or carer. Further information about carer requirements for each airline is set out in their DAFP and available on their website. You may also request further information at the time of booking.

11. Contingency Planning

If unexpected events impact on the accessibility of a particular scheduled flight or airline's capability to carry mobility aids, particularly when there are changes to the type of aircraft in operation, the airline should contact you as soon as possible to arrange suitable and timely alternative travel arrangements.

12. Complaints Resolution

If you are unhappy with the level of service provided to you by an airline or an airport and you wish to make a complaint, you should contact the airline or airport operator directly in the first instance. You can obtain information on how to make a complaint by consulting the operator's DAFP or by speaking to customer service representatives.

If you are not satisfied with the operator's response and your complaint relates to discrimination, you may wish to take your complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), who will advise you of an appropriate course of action.

Similarly, if your complaint relates to an airline, you may also wish to consider raising your concerns with the Airline Customer Advocate (ACA). The ACA provides a free and independent service to customers of major Australian airlines by facilitating the resolution of current unresolved complaints about airline services. Further information on the ACA can be found at www.airlinecustomeradvocate.com.au.

13. Frequently Asked Questions

Q. *How much notice does the airline require?*

A. If you are travelling with your mobility aid you should provide the airline with at least 48 hours' notice. It is advisable to provide advance notice at the time of booking to ensure airline staff are able to discuss your needs with you and accommodate any requirements that you may need.

Q. *What types of mobility aids can I travel with?*

A. Generally, passengers can travel with the following types of mobility aids: canes; crutches; collapsible walking frames; prosthetic devices; wheelchairs – manual and electric; and scooters.

Q. *Is my mobility aid checked in with my baggage?*

A. You may be required to check-in your mobility aid depending on the aircraft type and size you will be travelling on, the type and size of your mobility aid, and other factors such as the location you are departing or arriving at. You should consult the airline's Disability Access Facilitation Plan or contact the airline's customer service team to confirm whether your mobility aid will be checked-in. More information is provided at Section 5. *Check-in at the Airport*.

Q. *Can I take my wheelchair into the aircraft cabin?*

A. No, you will not be able to take your wheelchair into the aircraft cabin.

Your wheelchair will either be collected at check-in or at the departure gate. Airline staff will discuss with you any assistance you may need after handing over your wheelchair and will assist you to transfer to a wheelchair supplied by the airline if required. More information is provided at Section 5. *Check-in at the Airport* and Section 7. *Boarding the aircraft*.

Q. *Are there size and weight limitations for mobility aids?*

A. Yes, there are size and weight requirements for transporting mobility aids. You should confirm exact requirements with the airline's Disability Access Facilitation Plan or by contacting the airline's customer service team as well as when booking your travel with the airline. More information is provided at Section 7. *Boarding the aircraft*.

Q. *How many mobility aids can travel with me?*

A. There may be limitations that apply to the number of mobility aids you can travel with due to the operational limitations of an aircraft and airlines may charge fees for additional items or be unable to accommodate a large number of items on a single flight due to limited storage space. More information is provided at Section 5.1 *Allowance of Mobility Aid Items*.

Q. *How much does it cost to take my mobility aid?*

A. Airlines generally allow for two mobility aids to be transported at no extra cost. If you wish to travel with more than two items, you should confirm any additional costs by contacting the airline you wish to travel with directly.

Q. *Where can I find information on mobility assistance?*

A. You can obtain information on mobility assistance through direct email or telephone to airline and airport staff, at customer service and information counters, and in Disability Access Facilitation Plans (DAFP), published on airline and airport websites.