

Prepare for take off

Air travel tips for people with disability





Acknowledgements

Disability Services Commission

The Disability Services Commission is the state government agency responsible for advancing opportunities, community participation and quality of life for people with disability. The Commission's Community Access and Information Branch develops resources to promote access and inclusion of people with disability across the Western Australian community.

The information contained in this booklet has been compiled from the experiences of air travellers with disability, their families, carers and travelling companions

Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability provides independent advice to the Western Australian Minister for Disability Services on issues affecting the lives of people with disability, their families and carers. The Council was established in 1994 in accordance with the Disability Services Act 1993.



People With Disabilities Western Australia (PWdWA)

People With Disabilities Western Australia (PWdWA) is the peak disability consumer organisation representing the rights, needs and equity of all Western Australians with physical, intellectual, psychiatric or sensory disability via individual and systemic advocacy. PWdWA is run by and for people with disability and strives to be the voice for all people with disability in Western Australia.





Contents

Before you Fly	2
Prepare to fly — do your homework	2
What do you need to find out or let the airline know?	2
What can you take with you?	2
What assistance can airport / airline staff provide?	3
What can you do to make your trip go smoothly?	3
Booking your flight	4
At the airport	5
Check-in	5
Mobility aids	5
Security screening	7
Waiting to board	8
Your flight	9
Boarding the plane	9
During the flight	9
Arrival at your destination	10
Getting off the plane (disembarking)	10
Collecting your baggage / mobility aids	10
Transfers / exiting the airport	10
Checklist	11
Further information / contact details	back cover



Thousands of people with all types of disability regularly travel by air. However, you may not know what to expect, particularly if it is your first time flying or you are travelling on a different airline. Service and travel procedures may vary between airlines and airports.

Planning your travel and following the tips provided in this guide will help make your journey smoother and more enjoyable.



Before you fly

Prepare to fly – do your homework

Many airlines and airport operators have developed a Disability Access Facilitation Plan which outlines how they meet the needs of travellers with disability. Many airlines and airport operators also have information on their websites for passengers with medical conditions, or physical, intellectual or sensory disability. It is important that you read this information.

To prepare for your journey, consider the following:

What do you need to find out or let the airline know?

- Check the airline website to find out which medical conditions require a 'fitness to travel' clearance. If in doubt, contact the airline.
- Size restrictions for mobility aids and/or assistive equipment.
- Policies on guide dogs, other assistance animals and any assistance you require such as collecting your baggage.
- Special dietary requirements.
- Airline requirements or policy regarding people with mobility restrictions. At most major airports you can get to the larger planes via aerobridges. On smaller planes you may have to use specially designed lifts to get safely on and off the plane.

What can you take with you?

- Planes have restrictions to the size and weight of baggage that can be carried particularly smaller planes in regional areas. Ensure your mobility aid or assistive equipment can be loaded on the plane.
- Check for rules on medication/medical sharps or oxygen bottles that you might need to take with you.



What assistance can airport/airline staff provide?

- Getting on and off the aircraft (ie boarding and disembarking).
- Assistance to get to departure gates, through the airport and to connecting flights.
- Personal assistance during the flight – for example opening meal containers or assistance getting to the toilet.

What can you do to make your trip go smoothly?

- Are you able to understand and respond to briefings about emergency procedures, get to and from the plane toilet, self medicate and eat and drink independently? Some airlines will require that you can do these to travel independently.
- If you cannot travel independently, you may be required to travel with a companion or carer.
- Check if the airline supports the Companion Card, as your carer's airfare may be subsidised.
- Have a back-up plan ready should any step not go as planned. This may be as simple as phoning home to ask a question or asking the airport/airline staff.
- Make sure you make a note of everything that is important, confirm everything and keep a copy in your hand luggage.
- Make sure that luggage is manageable at all times. You may find it useful to have a suitcase on wheels to check into baggage and a backpack for the plane. This may allow you to have your hands free to hold passports and tickets.
- Contact the airline in advance to discuss what assistance they provide for people with disability and specifically ask about your own assistance requirements. This will enable you to know what to expect and allow the airport/airline to have someone ready to assist you.
- You may feel more at ease if you know what is likely to happen before, during and after the flight – it might help to go through the steps beforehand with someone, or look at some pictures of what to expect.
- Consider possible delays and queues at check-in, waiting to board, waiting to take off and waiting for baggage. There may be queues going through passport control and customs on international flights.
- Other things that might help you to know include that you may have a different seat number on your return trip. Special dietary meals are usually served first and cleared away when all meal trays are collected. Refreshments are usually served during the flight.



Booking Your Flight

- If you are booking through the internet, check if the booking format allows you to provide information about your needs. If in doubt, contact the airline before booking.
- Ask the airline if they have equipment to help transfer passengers who cannot transfer by themselves. If there is no equipment, ask how the manual transfer will occur to reduce the likelihood of injury to the person being transferred, or assisting.
- Ask the airline if they provide assistance to accompany you in case you need help to find your way from check-in, through the airport and to find your seat on the plane.
- Where possible, book in advance as some airlines will require time to ensure your needs can be met. In some situations an airline may require 96 hours (four days) advance notice.
- Make sure the booking officer or travel agent is aware of your disability and related needs and that they inform the airline. The assistance you need may be marked on your boarding pass.
- Ask about travel insurance and find out what is covered.
- Ask if there is anything else you need to do. For example, most airlines will ask you to arrive earlier than other passengers, to ensure plenty of time for check-in and boarding.
- Smaller airlines flying in regional areas may restrict people from flying who cannot get on and off the plane independently.

If you have any concerns, talk to the airline before you book.





At the Airport

Check-in

- You may need to arrange your own assistance to get into the airport and to the check-in counter.
- Advise the person at check-in if you require additional legroom or for the seat armrest to lift up for ease of transfer.
- You will receive your seat allocation and your boarding pass. You may be asked to get to the departure gate early.
- You may need to provide proof that your guide dog or assistance dog has been appropriately trained and accredited. If you are travelling with a guide dog, you should take an absorbent mat for the dog to sit on during the flight. This is usually provided by the airline but taking your own can bypass any problems, for example if staff are unable to find one.
- If you require a wheelchair to get to connecting flights, ask if one is available.
- If you feel you are not getting the help you need, it may be useful to speak to the manager on duty.
- If you need help to find the person meeting you at the end of your journey, make sure that the airline has details of this person, including their contact number.

Be at the airport in plenty of time to avoid rushing and queues.

Mobility aids

Airlines will usually carry your essential main mobility aid free of charge. Additional aids can be taken as excess baggage but you may be charged for these items.

Large mobility aids such as electric wheelchairs, scooters and walking frames will have to be checked in along with baggage. Check-in staff will direct you to another area to do this if necessary.

Carry information about the wheelchair battery so it can be provided to airport/airline staff if needed. Wet, spillable batteries may need to be disconnected for transportation. All batteries should be isolated by a switch or by removing the control module.

You may like to disconnect and remove the hand control module and take it on board with your hand luggage. This will ensure it is safe and easy to find when you reach your destination.

You may like to remove the head rest, table, and other easily removable parts and tape these to the chair or include them in your luggage. Some airlines need to remove these parts to fit the mobility aid on the plane. It is safer for the owner to take them off and store them properly.

Alternatively, you may like to take a simple picture/diagram that shows how these items can be removed or how the aid can be folded, if needed. There is a form at the back of this booklet that can be used for this purpose.



- Tell check-in staff about your essential main mobility aid.

You may like to photograph the mobility aid before it is handed over at the airport so if it is accidentally damaged in transit, there is a record of what it looks like prior to departure.

Remember to take the cushion off your wheelchair as you may want to use it on the plane. If you use an air cushion, take a pump as you will need to deflate the cushion in the air and reinflate it at your destination.



- You can draw the picture on the form provided and bring it along with you.



Security screening

Every person going to the departure lounge will need to go through the security screening process. This is to ensure that metal objects, potential weapons or hazardous materials are identified and not taken past this point.

Hypodermic needles can be packed in your carry-on luggage but you must have proof that they are medically necessary.

Any luggage you intend taking on the plane will go through an x-ray machine. You will need to place all belongings such as keys, coins, wallet, handbag, pens, electronic devices in the trays provided. You may be asked to remove your shoes so that they can be x-rayed.

If you are blind or have a vision impairment, the security staff should explain the screening process. You should not be asked to separate from your guide dog at any time.

You will be asked to go through a metal detector that will electronically screen you for metal objects. Tell security staff that you have a medical condition such as a pacemaker, cochlear implant or a prosthesis that may be affected by the screening process, or if you have an implanted metal device that may affect the screening equipment.

If you are unable to walk through the detector, security staff will use a hand held metal detector to screen you.

You may also receive a pat down. You may be asked to sit down or to hold onto a support to do this. Screening can be done in a separate private area.

You may have a piece of clothing or shoes swabbed, to test for hazardous substances.

Mobility aids must also be screened and may need to undergo an x-ray or explosive trace detection test.



It is always worth getting a letter from your specialist or GP to explain that you will be carrying medication / surgical sharps needed while flying.



Waiting to board

Carry identification on you at all times and do not leave your tickets/boarding pass/passport lying around, on a seat or table.

Delays can occur, so it's a good idea to have something with you such as music, or something to look at or read while you are waiting.

It may help you to be accompanied from check-in onto the plane to find your seat. If so, you should organise this in advance.

If you require assistance to board the plane by transferring from your wheelchair onto your seat on the plane, you may be waiting in another area near to other passengers, at the boarding gate.



Your flight

Boarding the plane

- If you are using mobility aids, you will usually be assisted to board the plane before other passengers. You may be in another waiting area to the other passengers.
- If you are blind or have a vision impairment, you can be guided to your seat by a travelling companion or airport/airline staff.
- If you are using a manual wheelchair, you can usually transfer to the airport/airline wheelchair just before boarding and have your wheelchair put in baggage at that time.
- If you are using a wheelchair, you will need to transfer to a small aircraft wheelchair as the aisles on the plane are too narrow for standard wheelchairs. The transfer can often take place before you get on the plane.
- Airline staff will push the small wheelchair to your allocated seat.
- You will need to transfer to your allocated seat. Occupational Health and Safety regulations do not allow airline employees to physically lift a person. A slide board, slide sheet or hoist can be used to assist, if you are unable to independently transfer.
- Walking aids, like crutches, will need to be stowed in the overhead lockers or in the cupboards near the galley/toilets. You may need to remind staff to collect these for you at your destination. They can be brought to you before the plane docks and the seatbelt sign is switched off.

- Airline staff can assist you onto the plane and guide you to your correct seat.
- Airline staff will go through the emergency procedures with you, before the other passengers board the plane.

During the flight

Some people may feel stressed before or during flying. It can help to know what will help you (or a person you know who will be flying) prepare as best as possible for the journey.

Planes on long flights may have a small onboard wheelchair that can be used to assist passengers to get to the toilet. These onboard wheelchairs cannot be used independently and require someone to push it. You can ask airline staff for assistance by pressing the attendant button.

Airline staff may check on you during the flight, remind you to have drinks, meals and do stretches to prevent deep vein thrombosis.

If you need help filling in an immigration card for international flights — ask the airline staff if they can assist with this.





Arrival at your destination

Getting off the plane (disembarking)

- If you are using a mobility aid and need assistance, you are usually assisted off the plane at the destination after other passengers disembark.
- If you are using a wheelchair, you will need to transfer from your seat to a small aircraft wheelchair and airport/airline staff will push the small wheelchair off the plane.
- Due to Occupational Health and Safety regulations, airline employees are not allowed to physically lift a person. A slide board, slide sheet or hoist can be used to assist if you are unable to transfer independently.
- You can ask to be accompanied from the plane. This is especially useful for connecting flights or if you are unsure about finding your way around in the airport, or to find the person meeting you.

Collecting your baggage / mobility aid

- Airport/airline staff can assist you to get to the luggage pick-up area.
- You will be able to transfer to your own wheelchair either close to the plane or sometimes in the luggage pick-up area.
- Note that transfer procedures at overseas airports may vary from your experiences in Australia.
- It is okay to ask to visit the bathroom when you get off the plane, before you collect your baggage.
- Ask for assistance to remove luggage from the carousel if needed and to leave the airport.

Transfers / exiting the airport

- At the start of your journey when you check in, ask or arrange to be accompanied from the plane to assist in finding your way to connecting flights or to exit the airport. You may find this useful when going through passport control / immigration / customs (on international flights), collecting baggage, finding the person who is meeting you at the airport or to get a taxi.
- In the event there is no aerobridge, you may need to embark and disembark in a catering lift or other moveable vehicle.
- You need to consider if you will require your mobility aid (that has been in baggage during your flight) while transferring to a connecting flight at the airport. If there is only a short amount of time between connecting flights, this may not be possible.
- You may need to consider if you require an accessible vehicle such as a taxi to pick you up at your destination and you might like to pre-arrange this.
- At journey's end or mid journey, if you are going through a few different airports, you may wish to use the airport wheelchair to get you to connecting flights. This needs to be arranged in advance when you check in. It is also a good idea to see if you can arrange it when you make the initial booking.

Checklist

Before booking a flight

- ☐ Do you require a 'Fitness to Travel Certificate'? If unsure, check with the airline.
- ☐ Find out what assistance the airport/airline's staff can offer you.
- ☐ Does the airline offer Companion Card rates? (If you need a carer, they may be able to travel at a reduced rate.)
- ☐ Once you have chosen an airline, read the disability related information on their website.
- ☐ You may not be able to book online if you are not able to register the assistance you need.

Booking your flight

- ☐ When booking, advise that you have a disability or medical condition.
- ☐ You may need to give the dimensions and weight of your wheelchair or mobility aid.
- ☐ Discuss travel insurance with your travel / booking agent.
- ☐ If you have connecting flights and have to wait in an airport, consider if you need your mobility aid during this stopover. If the stopover is short, this may not be possible.
- ☐ Ask the travel / booking agent what the process will be when you get to the airport.
- ☐ Ask whether you check in electronically or at the check-in counter.
- ☐ Ring the airline a day before your flight to confirm that your needs for the flight have been noted.

At the check-in counter

- ☐ Allow additional time to check-in and for airport/airline procedures.
- ☐ Have you requested that you, your travelling companion, friend or carer are sitting together?
- ☐ Do you need to request an aisle seat on the plane where the armrest lifts up?
- ☐ Advise check-in staff if you need help to get onto the plane or to find your way.
- ☐ Advise airline staff if your seat is located at the emergency exit as this may not be permitted (to be seated in this area of the plane, you need to be able to assist in an emergency) and staff will allocate you a different seat.
- ☐ Ask to transfer from your mobility aid at the plane. In some instances you may need to transfer before getting to the plane.
- ☐ Have you thought about toilet considerations given the length of the flight?
- ☐ At your destination you may need to remind airline staff to bring you your mobility aid, crutches and baggage.
- ☐ Keep your plane ticket and passport handy if travelling internationally.
- ☐ If you are a Taxi User Subsidy Scheme member travelling interstate, the Western Australian Department of Transport can provide information on reciprocal taxi subsidy arrangements.
- ☐ Other things to think about (add your own ideas)

Further ideas to be noted

Tear here

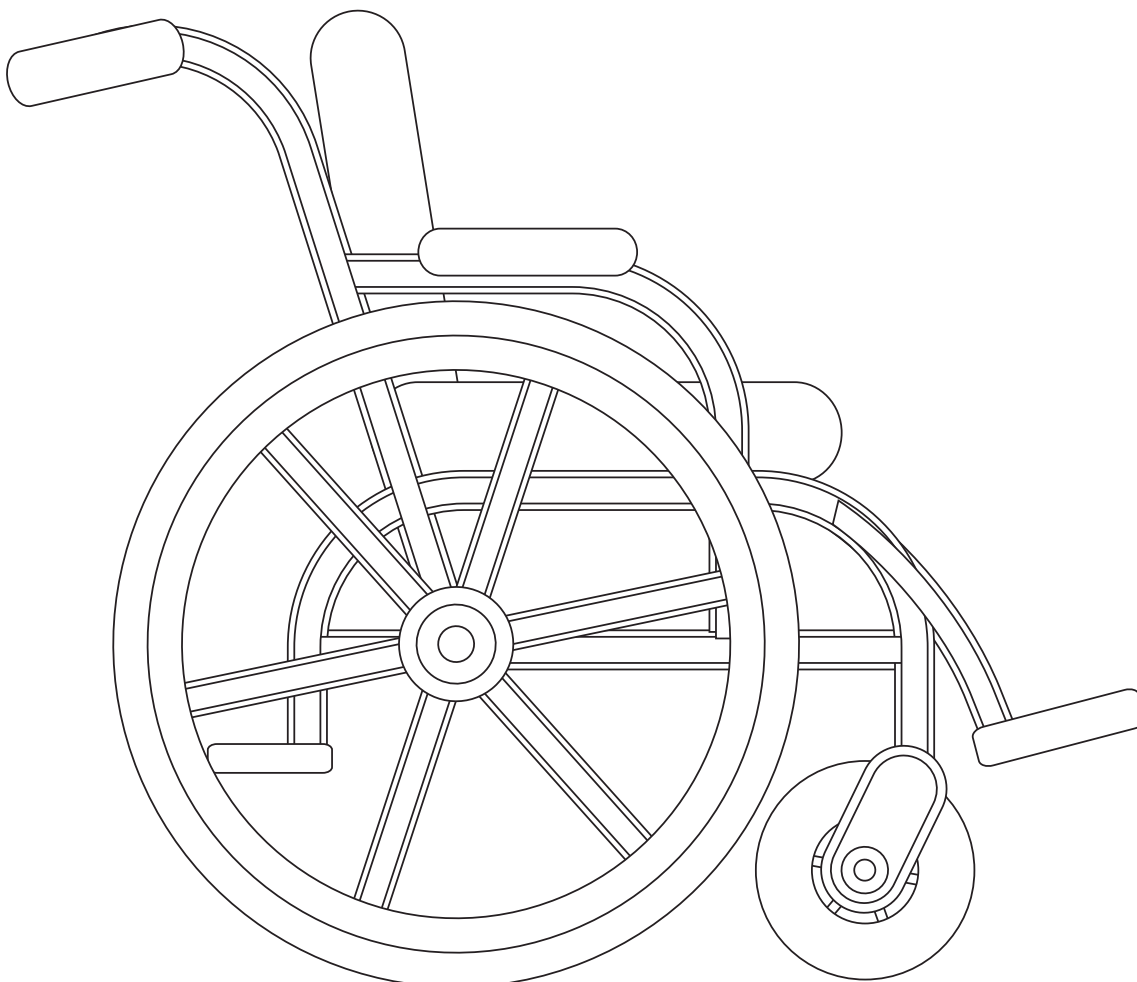
This form may be useful if you have a large mobility aid. Airport/airline staff will ask for this information. You can be prepared by giving them a copy and/or placing this form in a plastic sleeve and attaching it to your mobility aid. You could keep copies for any future trips.

My name

Details about my mobility aid

- Height _____
- Weight _____
- Width _____
- Battery type _____

Glue, print or draw your mobility aid here or use the picture below to show where the battery isolation switch is or where it can be adjusted if necessary.



- Include brief comments you want to inform the airport/airline about your mobility aid.

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Australian Government – TravelSECURE

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Australian Government – Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA)

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Australian Human Rights Commission

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