



4511 North Himes Ave., Suite 250
Tampa, FL 33614

(800) 717-3117
(813) 872-7835
Fax: (813) 873-7838

info@obesityaction.org
www.obesityaction.org

Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) Airline Policy Statement

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) recognizes the current standards and practices used by the United States airline industry in regards to the travel process (booking travel, purchasing of additional seat, determination of ability to fly based on size, etc.) must change. Those affected by excess weight experience an overall diminished quality of travel due to the lack of understanding, education and sensitivity to their condition. These standards and practices must change to accommodate the millions of Americans affected by excess weight who utilize the airline industry for their traveling needs on a daily basis.

In order to assist the airline industry in modifying and bettering their practices, the OAC has highlighted specific problem areas needing immediate attention. We have also highlighted long term areas of interest requiring action on the part of the airline industry.

Immediate Action Needed

Purchasing of Extra Seat

Those affected by excess weight often want to save themselves the embarrassment of being “required” to purchase an extra seat and therefore, seek to purchase the extra seat online when booking their travel. Unfortunately, it is not simple to purchase another seat online for the same person. The check-in process can often lead to even further embarrassment as security and gate agents often question the use of the same ID for two tickets.

Solution

A new user-interface must be developed allowing those who wish to purchase a second seat to easily do so online. Ticket counter employees, gate agents, flight attendants and others must also be educated on the option for a passenger to purchase an extra seat and treat that individual with respect and sensitivity.

For those who are “required” to purchase an extra seat based on airline policy, the cost of the extra seat will be reimbursed if there is at least one open seat on the plane. The open seat must be a seat not used by a paying customer. If the airline should choose to use that seat for a non-paying customer, such as a flight crewperson, the passenger still needs to be reimbursed their fare for the extra seat as the available seat is now occupied by a non-paying customer.

Assessment of Ability to Fly due to Size

The current standard and practice by which a passenger is deemed able to fly or required to purchase an additional seat, due to their physical size, must change. Current practices often have the assessment of the passenger’s ability to fly taking place inside the aircraft. This approach greatly increases the negative stigma associated with excess weight and embarrasses the passenger in front of his/her peers.

Solution

The process of assessing whether an individual requires an additional seat must be held in a private room out of view of passengers, other airline agents (other than the trained official evaluating the process) or the general public. Passengers in question would be required to sit in a sample airline seat (specific to each airline) and



4511 North Himes Ave., Suite 250
Tampa, FL 33614

(800) 717-3117
(813) 872-7835
Fax: (813) 873-7838

info@obesityaction.org
www.obesityaction.org

perform the required safety measures, such as lowering the arm rest and buckling the seatbelt (with the assistance of a seatbelt extender if needed). Once completed, the passenger would then be cleared to fly or provided with a detailed explanation regarding their denial of travel or second seat purchase requirement. Once aboard the aircraft, under no circumstances should the passenger be required to once again demonstrate their ability to fit into a seat or perform any other qualification requirements other than those specified by the FAA, such as viewing the safety demonstration or verbally agreeing to assist other passengers if seated in an “exit row.”

Sensitivity Training for All Airline Employees

Travelers affected by excess weight often express horrific stories of being made to prove their ability to fit into a seat, while flight crews watched, explain tirelessly why they have two seats registered to one person and much more. Travelers affected by weight are not second-class citizens and the treatment of them as such must immediately stop.

Solution

Sensitivity training is a must for the airline industry. Along with the above mentioned issues, sensitivity training is crucial in building a more accepting environment for passengers of size. Unfortunately, weight stigma is one of the last acceptable forms of discrimination in the United States. As the diversity of customers for the airline industry is immeasurable, the airline industry must ensure that it is serving each customer, regardless of size, with respect, dignity and sensitivity. The OAC stands by ready and waiting to assist any airliner with the implementation of sensitivity training for their employees.

Long term Issues

Widening of All Airline Seats

A long term initiative that is achievable by the airline industry is the widening of all airline seats. The average airliner today uses seats that are 17” – 17.2” wide. Unfortunately, this is not aligned with the current size of the average American as millions are affected by excess weight. The much-needed widening of airline seats is long overdue. Such widening should allow for the vast majority of Americans to travel on a single fare without the requirement of purchasing a second seat.

Solution

The widening of the all airline seats will better accommodate the general public and reduce the number of individuals, affected by excess weight, being denied travel. The airline industry has failed to appropriately assess the size of an average passenger throughout the past 25 years; leading to many passengers, even those who would be deemed “normal weight” according to a body mass index scale, feeling uncomfortable during their travels. The airline industry must adapt to a more forward-thinking and proactive methodology in constructing their aircrafts with the needs of Americans as a first priority. Major industries, such as sporting venues, automobiles and others have made changes in their seating standards to accommodate people of all shapes and sizes – the airline industry must follow suit. In the interim, immediate inclusion of a limited number of wider seats is a shorter term solution; however, the complete overhaul of airline seating must be addressed in a timely manner as millions of Americans utilize the airline industry on a daily basis.