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Rehabilitation Engineering And Research Center, Passenger Assistance Training, Research and Training Curriculum Development for Air Carrier Personnel Assisting Passengers With Disabilities And Seniors

The Center on Self-Determination is working with consumers, U.S. air carriers, and subcontractors who assist people with disabilities and seniors in boarding/deplaning aircraft to research and develop a model Passenger Assistance Training curriculum. As a key component of the NIDRR-funded RERC on Accessible Inter-City Transportation, 6 studies inform this nationally-applicable Training Development effort. The curriculum will also be adapted to Rail and Intercity Bus transportation modes to further promote safe, dignified travel for all persons.

Background: Oregon State University's National Center for Accessible Transportation (NCAT) is working in partnership with Oregon Health and Science University's (OHSU) Center on Self-Determination (CSD) to increase accessibility to interstate travel for persons with disabilities and seniors. Research activities include: The biomechanics of boarding and travel in confined spaces such as aircraft and, the psychology of existing and proposed accessibility solutions. Development activities include: Vehicle boarding technologies, open-caption communications systems, single-aisle-vehicle accessible lavatories, and passenger assistance training tools and techniques.

Methods: Researchers at the CSD are focusing specifically on the creation of a comprehensive passenger assistance training curriculum for transportation personnel serving passengers with disabilities and seniors. This curriculum is informed by 4 distinct lines of inquiry: 1) critical appraisal of the current state of the intercity transportation industry by application of promising practice training standards and provider self-assessment information, 2) provider and passenger focus group data, 3) national surveys of passengers who do and do not choose to utilize intercity transportation, and 4) biomechanics research to determine the safest, most efficient methods to assist passengers with physical transfers.

Results: Several existing training systems have been evaluated based on promising practice standards for personnel training developed by the CSD. These standards have also been packaged into a passenger assistance training self-assessment tool (PATSAT) with which transportation providers can examine their current training systems, identify strengths and potential gaps, and provide additional feedback to the project about training needs. Pending subject matter expert panel review and revision, the PATSAT will be distributed for use.

Transportation provider focus groups have been conducted in the western region of the U.S. to explore personnel training needs and additional groups are being planned for other regions. Passenger focus group protocols are currently under review by OHSU's

Institutional Review Board and are awaiting approval. Data from all groups is currently being analyzed for content and themes are being distilled.

Survey and biomechanics research is ongoing. Passenger perceptions about utilizing interstate transportation services are being explored through population-based surveys (n = 5000, n = 400). With motion capture techniques, biomechanics researchers also continue to investigate and formulate recommendations for assisted transfer techniques to minimize low-back and shoulder injuries.

Conclusions: In year 2 of 5, all research and development activities are ongoing. Some early themes that are emerging, however, include: 1) the need for standardized training content and training methods across the air carrier industry, 2) a general systemic devaluing of personnel directly responsible for assisting passengers with physical transfers, and 3) mixed levels of organizational concern for the issues faced by persons with disabilities and seniors when traveling by air.