

# So you think you want an Assistance Animal?

Things to consider...



## What kind of Animal do you want?

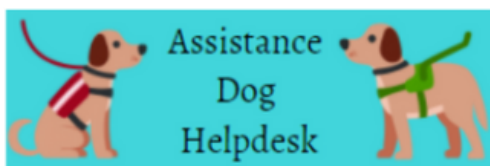
**Assistance Animal** – task trained to alleviate your disability. This animal, usually a dog, is trained in tasks that help you to participate in daily living. For example, placing washing into a machine for you, detecting changes in blood sugar levels or helping you to stand. These animals can accompany you in public.

**Emotional Support Animal** – an animal that provides emotional support to you at home. These animals are not task trained to alleviate your disability.

**Therapy Animal** – these animals are trained to visit facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes to provide emotional support to residents. They are not task trained to alleviate disability.

**Companion Animal** – these animals are pets that live with you in your home.

This resource was proudly developed by:



This resource was proudly sponsored by:



# How do I get an Assistance Animal?

An Assistance Animal is task trained to alleviate your disability. It must be prescribed for you by an Occupational Therapist (OT). This can be funded by the NDIS or it can be completely independent of the NDIS.

Any species can be trained to be an Assistance Animal, including horses, birds, cats and dogs. However, the animal must be carefully selected for its purpose.

Assistance Animals can be trained by organisation such as Assistance Dogs Australia or Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. Or they can be self-trained. This means that you obtain an Animal and work with an appropriate trainer to become an Assistance Animal.

Do NOT randomly select an animal based on its looks, temperament or perceived ability without the assistance of an experienced Assistance Animal trainer. Very few Animals are suitable for Assistance Animal work.

Once you have an Assistance Animal, you must work very hard to ensure it meets the legal requirements to receive public access rights. Public access rights are required before your Assistance Animal can accompany you in public.



## Where do I start?

The first step is engaging with a suitable Occupational Therapist (OT). Before prescribing an Assistance Animal they will undertake a number of assessments on daily living to ensure an Assistance Animal is right for you.

Before prescribing an Assistance Animal the OT will first implement alternatives including low-cost aids or therapies. The OT will check in with you regularly every few weeks while you trial these.

After approximately 6 months, the OT will undertake additional assessments to determine whether they are helping you. If they are not, the OT will assist you in exploring alternatives.

Assistance Dogs are considered to be a high-cost option. Therefore, it is considered once all alternatives have been exhausted. This is the same as high-cost bathroom modifications that would only be considered if all other alternatives had been exhausted.

An Assistance Animal is not a quick thing. Completing the prescription process takes many months of assessments and ongoing work with an OT. It cannot be completed in a single sitting.

## What else do I need to consider?

You need to consider the impact having an Assistance Animal will have on your life. For example, in public people are more likely to take notice of you and approach to pat your animal without realising they should not interfere with an Assistance Animal.

You need to think about how an Assistance Animal will fit into your day-to-day life. Can you accommodate their feeding, exercise, enrichment and toileting schedules?

If you enjoy taking holidays, you need to consider how your Assistance Animal will travel with you. Assistance Animals should not be kennelled unless in an emergency, for example. Their purpose is to be with you at all times to assist you.

If you live in an apartment or rent, you will need to consider whether an Assistance Animal can easily reside in your home. Assistance Animals need appropriate environments and for a dog, this means access to a secure garden for exercise and toileting.

Although Assistance Animals do not need to be listed on a leasing agreement, most people find it easier to make their landlord aware of their Assistance Animal.



## Anything else?

Do you work? You will need to consider whether your Assistance Animal can attend your place of employment with you. If you work as a baker this may not be appropriate, for example, as Assistance Animals cannot enter food preparation areas. What about schools, TAFEs or Universities? Assistance Animals may accompany you to these places, however, this may not be realistic in all circumstances. For example, a student doctor who spends a lot of time in dissection laboratories or a zoo keeper who works in a quarantine zone will be unable to be accompanied by their Assistance Animal due to the potential of disease transmission to their Animal.

One of the most important considerations that needs to be made is whether you can afford an Assistance Animal. Some of the costs involved are shown on the next page.

# How expensive is it?

## Initial Costs

- consultant fees to select an appropriate animal - purchase of the animal
- continual parasite prevention
- puppy vaccinations and heartworm injection - desexing
- equipment such as leads, harnesses and collars - training fees to provide early socialisation and training - increased transport fees (e.g. petrol to travel to training or vet appointments)
- OT assessments
- the cost of bowls, bedding, crate, etc
- plus other costs

## Ongoing Costs

- public liability insurance
- suitable high-quality diet
- suitable toys and enrichment
- 6 monthly vet visits
- annual veterinary assessment
- annual public access assessment
- 6 monthly trainer check-in
- plus other costs

All of these costs are mandatory! Guess what the average total is?

## How much does it cost?

An average Assistance Animal costs \$40,000 to TRAIN

What does the NDIS cover? The NDIS funds SOME Assistance Animals.

They MAY fund:

- Prescription of an Assistance Animal
- Selection of an Assistance Animal
- Training of an Assistance Animal
- Annual Accreditation of an Assistance Animal - Ongoing Maintenance of an Assistance Animal.

They MAY also fund a pre-trained Assistance Animal from an organisation.

Assistance Animal maintenance funding is reconsidered at each planning meeting and can be withdrawn in later plans.

Therefore, you should not assume that your Assistance Animal will receive continuous funding for life.

If you disagree with an NDIS decision you can appeal by lodging an Internal Review. If this is unsuccessful you can lodge your case with the AAT. You can be represented by a disability advocate or lawyer in these cases.





# How does an Assistance Animal work?

Once they are fully trained, an Assistance Animal will pass a Public Access Test (PAT). They will re-take this test every year to maintain their public access rights.

Once they have completed their PAT they are considered to be a fully fledged Assistance Animal and can accompany you in public in all places **EXCEPT** - quarantine facilities - sterile surgical suites (e.g. operating theatres), and - food preparation areas (e.g. cafe kitchen).

Your Assistance Animal should not be taken out in public if they are sick, pregnant or have any other ailment. It is best practice to desex Assistance Animals and not to breed them.

In public, the law requires an Assistance Animal to be hygienic. This means that they must be clean and well groomed. They must also exhibit appropriate behaviour. This means they must not pull you, and must not rush or jump on people or objects. An Assistance Animal who lunges, growls or is aggressive should not be taken out in public. You should consult with your vet and trainer immediately.

## What is the Law?

The law does not require Assistance Animals to undertake an annual Public Access Test (PAT). However, it is considered to be best practice.

Section 9(2)(c) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (DDA) requires that an Assistance Animal meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are suitable for presence in a public place. It also requires that the Animal is trained in at least 1 task to mitigate your disability. You must also have a disability that fits with the definition of disability described in the DDA.

In public areas, you may be asked to provide proof that you have an Assistance Animal with you and not a pet. Proof can include a combination of:

- completed PAT
- letter from a doctor, trainer or vet
- ID card or harness from an Assistance Animal training organisation
- any other form of suitable proof.

Some states and territories have their own laws. Federal law (DDA) trumps other laws. Therefore, if you are abiding by the requirements of the DDA you cannot get into trouble.



## What about Discrimination?

Many people accompanied by an Assistance Animal face issues with public access. This is a way of life, unfortunately. You may wish to carry a copy of Section 9(2)(c) of the DDA in your pocket or on your phone along with your proof, or you may wish to purchase an explanation card (similar to a business card) from CLW Consulting or other providers.

You can hand this card to people who question you. The card outlines your rights and their responsibilities and is a quick way to explain that they must let you enter with your Assistance Animal. These cards also list contact details for the AHRC, who can provide immediate advice.

If you are refused access, you can make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission about the person or business who refused you access. You may also wish to seek help from a disability advocate or lawyer.

You and your Assistance Animal have a legal right to access pubs, clubs, restaurants, hotels, AirBNBs, Ubers and Lyft, hospitals, National Parks and anywhere else that a member of the public is allowed to enter.

## What do I say if someone challenges me?

If you feel threatened or at risk of harm, call the police (Triple Zero – 000) to attend. Otherwise, you can try this trick. Ask the person, "Would you make me leave my wheelchair outside if I had one?"

Once the person says "No", you can explain to them that a wheelchair, walking frame or a walking stick are all like an Assistance Animal. They are all forms of Assistive Technology (AT). If they would not refuse access to a wheelchair, they cannot refuse access to your Assistance Animal.

You can also suggest that the person call the Australian Human Rights Commission (1300 369 711) for advice.

### **Still, have questions?**

Need more information? We can provide information and support via social media and our website.

### **Need Resources?**

The Australian Assistance Animal Handbook" is a peer-reviewed book that can be purchased from CLW Consulting or in shops, or online.

### **Follow us on Social Media**

