



Frequently asked questions

Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 (the Act)

What is a guide, hearing or assistance dog?

The Act defines a guide, hearing or assistance dog as a dog trained to perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours to assist a person with a disability to reduce the person's need for support.

Guide dog: a dog trained to be an effective guide for a person with a disability attributable to a vision impairment.

Hearing dog: a dog trained to be an aid for a person with a disability attributable to a hearing impairment.

Assistance dog: a dog trained to perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours to assist a person with disability to reduce their need for support.

What types of dogs can be trained as guide, hearing or assistance dogs?

Labradors and Retrievers are two of the most common breeds, but many other breeds are also trained. Mobility requirements, environment and physical ability determine the best breed for each type of disability.

What types of dogs will be certified under the Act?

Dogs that:

- can be used as a guide by a person with a disability attributable to a vision impairment; can be used as an aid by a person with a disability attributable to a hearing impairment; or can perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours to assist the person with disability in a way that reduces their need for support
- are not a restricted breed as defined under the *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008*

- have passed a Public Access Test (PAT) conducted by an approved trainer or training institution within seven days before being certified
- are de-sexed and vaccinated
- have not been declared a dangerous dog under a local law.

How can you tell if a dog really is a guide, hearing or assistance dog and not just a pet?

All certified guide, hearing and assistance dogs are required to display an approved badge on their coat or harness. You can confirm a dog's legitimacy by asking the person it is accompanying to show their handler's identity card.

What if a dog barks or growls at other people, or otherwise acts out of control?

A guide, hearing or assistance dog may be excluded from a public place if the animal's behaviour poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

If a person with a guide, hearing or assistance dog has no obvious disability, are they legitimate?

Not all forms of disability are obvious. For example, the person may have a psychiatric disability, a sensory disorder or diabetes. Their dog may be a highly specialised seizure alert/response/signal dog.

What is a public access test?

This test assesses whether a dog is safe and effective in a public place or public passenger vehicle, and able to be controlled by its handler.

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What is a breach of the Act?

Breaches include:

- not allowing a person with a certified guide, hearing, assistance or trainee support dog to enter a public place, public passenger vehicle or place of accommodation
- separating a person from their certified dog
- not providing services or charging a higher fee because the person is accompanied by a certified dog
- trainers failing to disclose their criminal history or changes to their criminal history
- falsely claiming to be an approved trainer or training institution.

What is the appropriate way to interact with a dog and its handler?

Always remember that the dog is working, so do not interrupt the dog from performing its tasks. Even though it may appear that it is not performing a task at that moment, the dog is always on call and must give its full attention to the handler and stay alert to possible dangers.

Are ‘companion dogs’ included in the Act?

No, nor are pets or comfort dogs or emotional support dogs.

Are there places that guide, hearing or assistance dogs cannot go?

Yes. Guide, hearing and assistance dogs do not have a right under the Act to enter:

- certain parts of health service facilities, including:
 - in-patient wards
 - labour wards
 - procedure rooms
 - recovery areas
 - areas with a significantly high standard of hygiene to prevent infection or spread of disease
 - areas for isolating people to prevent the movement of pathogens
 - areas where a dog’s presence is likely to significantly impair the safe or effective provision of a health service
- ambulances
- parts of a public place or public passenger vehicle where food is ordinarily prepared.

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