

## FAQ – mindDogs in the Workplace

### Assistance Dogs

Under the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (amended in 2009), Assistance Dogs and their owners are guaranteed access to all public spaces in Australia. This includes:

- Public footpaths and walkways
- Educational institutions
- Shops and department stores
- Banks, credit unions, building societies
- Parks, public swimming pools, public toilets and pedestrian malls
- Cafes, restaurants, pubs
- Theatres, and other places of entertainment
- Lawyers' offices, libraries, sporting venues, social and sporting clubs
- Government offices, public transport including trains, buses, ferries, boats, ships, planes and taxis, dentists' and doctors' surgeries, hospitals, hairdressers and beauty salons. On public transport they do travel with their handler, i.e. in the cabin of a plane or the passenger area of a ferry
- Travel agents, and government-run services

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Q: What is an Assistance Dog?

An Assistance Dog is a dog that alleviates or mitigates the effects of a disability or illness in their handler. They improve the quality of life for their owners, reduce the need for and dependence on medication, and increase the owners' participation and independence. They are used in a wide range of functions. In Australia, seeing-eye dogs, the most prominent type of Assistance Dogs, have been around for decades.

Hearing dogs have become increasingly common, and other types of Assistance Dogs are also emerging – medical alert dogs alert handlers to impending medical emergencies well in advance, thus allowing the handler to take appropriate steps to manage or avert the emergency. This includes but is not limited to: Diabetes Alert dogs, alerting their handlers to impending hypoglycaemic attacks; seizure alert dogs; and asthma alert dogs, alerting the owner to the first symptoms of an asthma attack.

Dogs can be trained to alert when the very first symptoms arise, as early as a chemical change in perspiration, heart-rate, blood pressure, breathing-rate – symptoms so subtle that even the individual is not aware of them.

Physical Assistance Dogs are used for people with physical disabilities. They can open and close doors, pick up things off the ground, or hand over credit cards at supermarket checkouts.

They can also be trained to react to emergencies appropriately, for example, when the handler has a fall, they will get the phone without further command, and bring it to the handler lying on the floor. Or they can alert neighbours if the handler is unconscious.

Assistance Dogs are also used as psychiatric assistance dogs, for example, to help sufferers of bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, PTSD and other psychiatric conditions.

Assistance Dogs can also be of great benefit to sufferers of dementia, autism spectrum disorders, HIV/AIDS and other conditions.

#### Q: What is a disability?

A disability is a physical, intellectual, emotional or mental impairment, illness or condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Being diagnosed with a condition does not necessarily mean that a person is disabled under the law. What matters is that the degree of impairment is 'substantial'.

Only a medical practitioner can make a comprehensive, case-by-case assessment as to whether a condition or illness constitutes a disability. For example, the loss of vision in one eye can, depending on the individual, pose substantial limitations, or hardly any.

#### Q: Is there anywhere Assistance Dogs aren't allowed?

Assistance Dogs may be lawfully excluded from private spaces including but not limited to private homes, private clubs, etc. They may also be excluded from spaces where their presence constitutes a safety risk, (e.g., operating theatres, radioactive laboratories, heavy construction sites). While generally not allowed in surgical theatres, Assistance Dogs have access to recovery, the Emergency Department, and other patient-areas of the hospital.

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### **Q: What do I do if I don't like dogs or am afraid of dogs?**

Place yourself away from the assistance dog. If you are a business person, discreetly arrange for someone else to wait on the person. You may ask the person to have the assistance dog lie down if it does not interfere with its work.

Very few allergic or phobic conditions are disabilities under the law. However, it is best to err on the side of safety. Welcome the assistance dog/handler team and ask them and the allergic or phobic person to sit away from each other.

### **Q: What do I do if the assistance dog barks, growls, or otherwise forgets its manners?**

Usually no action is required. Assistance Dog and handler are a team, and the handler usually deals with the situation appropriately.

It is important to realise that any Assistance Dog, no matter how extensively trained, will always be a dog. Even if the handler cannot tell why the dog is vocalising, the handler can calm down the dog, or will remove themselves and the dog from the situation.

Find out what happened before taking action. Was the assistance dog stepped on, poked, asleep and dreaming, performing its job (some vocalise to alert their handlers to hazards or impending medical emergencies well in advance, such as hypoglycaemic attacks, seizures, asthmatic attacks etc).

### **Q: What do I do if other people complain about the dog being present?**

Explain that the assistance dog is medically necessary and that federal law protects the right of the person to be accompanied by the assistance dog in public places.

### **Assistance Dog Etiquette**

#### **Assistance Dog Manners**

When you meet a person with a assistance dog, please remember that the dog is working. Don't do anything to interrupt the assistance dog while it is performing its tasks.

#### **Basic rules for interacting with people with Assistance Dogs:**

- Speak to the person first. Do not distract or make rude noises at the dog.

- Do not touch the assistance dog without asking for, and receiving, permission. Don't be offended if the handler declines. Keep in mind that having a assistance dog sometimes is a bit of a 'gauntlet-run,' and in a busy mall environment the handler might be asked every 2-5 minutes if the dog can be patted.

- Do not stare at the dog.

- Be aware that in all likelihood the handler of the assistance dog can hear you, so discussing the dog with your friend/colleague will likely be overheard by the person you are talking about

- Do not offer food to the assistance dog.

- If you have a dog and meet a assistance dog, please keep your dog away from the assistance dog. It is immensely stressful for dog and handler even if the dog, friendly or not, jumps all over the working assistance dog. Please keep your dog at a distance, until asking for, and receiving, permission for the dogs to meet

- Please do keep your children away from the assistance dog until having asked for and received permission to pat or approach the dog. A person might have a condition such as PTSD that is aggravated by children (e.g. after experiencing violence by children or teenagers). The dog will respond to alert the handler to children, and might protect the handler when teenagers charge or lunges at the dog/handler team.

- Do not ask personal questions about the handler's disability, or otherwise intrude on his or her privacy. • Don't be offended if the handler does not wish to chat about the assistance dog.

- Do not whistle or make sounds to the dog as this again may provide a dangerous distraction.
- Never make assumptions about the individual's intelligence, feelings or capabilities.

