



Your Rights in Australia when using a Service Dog (Assistance Dog)

In Australia, people with disability have the legal right to access public places and services with a properly trained assistance dog (often called a service dog).

These rights are protected under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (DDA). Under this law, it is unlawful discrimination to refuse access, entry, or service to a person because they use an assistance animal, except in very limited circumstances.

This applies across Australia and covers:

- Shops, cafés, restaurants, pubs and supermarkets
- Public transport (buses, trains, trams, ferries, taxis, rideshare)
- Accommodation (hotels, motels, short term rentals, caravan parks, rentals)
- Health services (hospitals, clinics, allied health services)
- Public buildings, events and venues

“No pets” policies do not override the law for assistance dogs.

Under section 9 of the Disability Discrimination Act, an assistance animal is an animal that:

- Is trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of their disability, and
- Meets appropriate standards of behaviour and hygiene for public places, and
- Is either:
 - Accredited under State or Territory law, or
 - Accredited by a recognised training organisation, or
 - Individually trained to the required standard

Assistance dogs are considered **mobility or medical aids**, not pets.

They may assist with:

- Vision or hearing impairment
- Mobility and physical disability
- Medical alert (e.g. seizures)
- Psychosocial disability (e.g. PTSD, autism)

Service Dog vs Support Animal

Assistance Dog (Service Dog)

- Specially trained to perform tasks related to a disability
- Meets public access behaviour and hygiene standards
- Has full public access rights under federal law
- Protected by anti discrimination law

Emotional Support/Support Animal

- Provides comfort or emotional support
- **Not legally recognised under Australian law**
- No automatic public access rights
- Treated the same as a pet for access purposes

Training and Registration Pathways

Australia does not have a single national registration system.

A service dog can qualify through:

- Training and accreditation via a recognised organisation (e.g. guide, hearing or PTSD assistance programs)
- State-based accreditation schemes (e.g. Queensland GHAD certification)
- Carefully supervised owner-training that meets public access standards

Key points:

- Formal registration is not mandatory under the DDA
- Businesses can request reasonable evidence that the dog is an assistance animal
- Evidence may include an ID card, training certification, or handler documentation
- There is no single approved document required by law
- What Staff Are Allowed (and Not Allowed) to Ask

Staff may:

- Ask whether the animal is an assistance dog
- Ask for evidence that the dog meets training, hygiene and behaviour standards

Staff must NOT:

- Ask for details about your disability
- Refuse entry because of "no pets" rules
- Charge extra fees
- Separate you from your assistance dog

Refusal is only lawful if there is a reasonable belief of serious health risk, such as suspected infectious disease, and the refusal is necessary and proportionate

If You Are Refused Entry or Access

Step 1: Stay Calm and State Your Rights

Explain that:

- Your dog is a trained assistance dog
- You are protected under the Disability Discrimination Act

Many refusals occur due to lack of staff knowledge and are resolved at this stage.

Step 2: Document the Incident

If refusal continues:

- Note the date, time, location and staff name
- Record what was said
- Keep copies of any evidence you showed

Step 3: Make a Complaint

You can complain to:

- Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) - for federal discrimination complaints
- Your State or Territory Anti Discrimination or Human Rights Commission

Complaints are usually free, and many are resolved through conciliation rather than court action.

Some assistance dog organisations also provide access issue support or mediation services for real time assistance.

Key Take-Home Messages

- Assistance dogs are working disability aids, not pets
- Emotional support animals do not have public access rights in Australia
- Registration is helpful but not legally required
- Refusing access to a person with a legitimate assistance dog is unlawful discrimination
- You have the right to challenge refusal and make a complaint



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