



ASSISTANCE DOG BROCHURE

Helping you understand the legal language and know your options to training
your assistance dog in Victoria



FACEBOOK: ANNIE'S DOGS: VICTORIAN ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINING

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PLEASE READ BEFORE CONTINUING.

Over the next few pages I am going to provide you with the legal definition of assistance dogs and what it means for us in Victoria specifically. I will also outline the services I offer to help you with assistance dog certification. If you are in another state, please refer to your state's assistance dog regulations as these guidelines are specific to Victoria's legislation only.

Please note, when it comes to explaining the legalities of assistance dogs, I am going to refer and quote from other sources to ensure you gain the most up to date information in the most accurately worded way possible. I will then provide commentary where commentary is needed for ease of understanding. Wherever words are not found within "" these are my own words, and where words are quoted, I always give the source.

It is important to understand that no course is a guarantee that your dog will be successful in their registration as every course, from every business, must hold participants to external standards. Prior to attending any course your dog already needs to have the right temperament (even if they don't have the other standards yet). Temperament means they are non-reactive to the environment, people or other dogs, are confident and show no signs of anxiety or nervousness.

Many thanks,

Annie

LEGAL DEFINITION OF ASSISTANCE DOGS

“The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) Section 9, sets out the legal definition of an assistance animal as a dog or other animal that is:

- (a) **Accredited** under a State or Territory law to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of disability; or
- (b) **Accredited** by an animal training organisation prescribed in the regulations; or
- (c) **Trained** to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.”

Taken from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/>

Regarding (b) above:

“There is no national register of Assistance Dogs in Australia at this time. **Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia** and the **ACT** have programs for accreditation and registration of Assistance Dogs. However, at this time, **New South Wales, Victoria, the Northern Territory and Tasmania**, do not have a formal system of accreditation or registration offered by local or state government.”

Taken from: www.assistancedogs.org.au/

Specifically for Victoria:

“You can apply for an Assistance Animal Pass if you need your animal to help manage your disability while you use public transport. An assistance animal is trained, like a Guide Dog, to help you ease or manage the effects of a disability or condition. Not all animals are assistance animals, even if they assist you in some way. Companion, therapy and facility animals are not considered assistance animals. House training and general obedience aren’t enough to qualify your animal for an Assistance Animal Pass.”

Taken from: <https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/>

MY COMMENTARY: HELPING YOU UNDERSTAND THE LEGAL DEFINITION OF AN ASSISTANCE DOG IN VICTORIA:

An assistance dog in Victoria needs to perform tasks that you require for a diagnosed condition you live with.

In Victoria, these tasks cannot include helping you feel loved or valued.

Examples of accepted tasks include but are not limited to a medical alert dog that tells you when your blood sugar levels are low; or a physical mobility dog that helps you pick up objects that you can’t otherwise reach etc, or an anxiety support dog that moves around you in circles to prevent crowds getting to close; or a PTSD assistance dog that provides deep pressure by sitting on you; or an autism support dog that finds a child who has run away.

Because assistance dogs are providing a need for you, they are allowed public access (i.e. they can go with you into the supermarket) wherever you go.

Therapy dogs, emotional support dogs, companion dogs etc. do not have this same unbridled access.

Turn the page to read about the training requirements of an assistance dog in Victoria.

REQUIREMENTS OF AN ASSISTANCE DOG

“The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) Section 9, sets out the legal definition of an assistance animal as a dog or other animal that is:

- (d) **Accredited** under a State or Territory law to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of disability; or
- (e) **Accredited** by an animal training organisation prescribed in the regulations; or
- (f) **Trained** to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.”

Taken from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/>

“Other Australian states require assistance animals to pass a Public Access Test. This assesses an animal’s ability to work and behave as an assistance animal in public places, including on public transport.

Assistance animals need to be:

- non-aggressive
- obedient to their handler's commands
- quiet (no barking)
- experienced in real life situations
- calm in confined and crowded spaces
- calm in noisy and stressful situations.

In Victoria your animal doesn’t need to complete a Public Access Test, but we strongly recommended that your trainer use the requirements as a guide to minimum standards of behavior and hygiene.”

Taken from: <https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/>

“Your assistance dog must also have completed obedience, including assessment in the following skills:

- heeling or walking with a handler, without sniffing, marking or wandering
- sociability with other dogs
- responsiveness to a handler’s commands, including staying on command (known as a stay test) and coming to a handler on command (known as a recall test)
- absence of aggression towards humans or other animals
- absence of anxiety, stress, fear, or undue excitement when in public places, and
- standard of hygiene appropriate for a public place.

“This training needs to be completed by a dog trainer and be evidenced by an obedience certificate and a declaration by the relevant dog trainer. The obedience training will need to be provided by a person who either:

- holds a qualification in Certificate III in Dog Behaviour and Training or

- a Certificate IV in Companion Animal Services or
- is a qualified dog obedience trainer with one of the following Ministerially approved dog obedience training organisations:
 - Australian Association of Professional Dog Trainers Inc
 - Four Paws K9 Training
 - The Kintala Dog Club Association Inc.
 - Delta Institute

Taken from:

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/domestic-animals-act/registration-legislation-and-permits/updates/assistance-dog-registration-scheme#h2-1>

“The owner of an assistance dog must demonstrate that:

- they have a disability as defined under the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA Cth)
- the assistance dog is trained to perform tasks or functions that assist to alleviate the effect(s) of that disability (as per the definition of assistance dog under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*).

“In addition to the above, your assistance dog needs to:

- be desexed
- be microchipped
- be at least 12 months of age
- be proven to have completed obedience training provided by a dog trainer.
Note: The obedience training can either be completed separately, or as part of the training undertaken to perform tasks or functions that assist the person with a disability to alleviate the effects of their disability.
- not be a dangerous, menacing, or restricted breed dog.

“Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, a person may request that a person with a disability produce evidence that an animal is an assistance animal. Given that an assistance animal – in this case an assistance dog – is distinguished by being trained to alleviate the effect of a disability, it is appropriate to ask for evidence that the animal is required for this purpose.

Evidence of a disability (as defined under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992) necessitating you to be accompanied by your assistance dog may include a:

- declaration from a health professional as part of a registration application form, or

- a written recommendation from and/or a declaration by the relevant treating medical practitioner to verify that you have a disability and will require the assistance of an assistance dog.”

Taken from:

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/domestic-animals-act/registration-legislation-and-permits/updates/assistance-dog-registration-scheme#h2-1>

MY COMMENTARY: HELPING YOU UNDERSTAND THE REQUIREMENTS OF AN ASSISTANCE DOG IN VICTORIA-

All assistance dogs in Victoria require their owner to have a diagnosed condition/disability. This means, you cannot be self-diagnosed, or just want your dog to be with you because they make you feel better. A specialist/general practitioner is required to have diagnosed you with a disability in order for you to qualify for an assistance animal in Victoria. You will need to carry with you a letter from your medical practitioner to this effect.

All assistance dogs in Victoria must perform several identifiable tasks that alleviate the effect of your disability. In Victoria "emotional support" is not considered a task that would satisfy the standard of an assistance dog. Examples instead include: Making the bed for someone with a physical disability; Creating space for someone who has PTSD; Providing grounding for someone on the ASD spectrum; and the list goes on.

All assistance dogs in Victoria must be well kept, which includes their hygiene, grooming requirements and toilet training.

All assistance dogs in Victoria must be behaviourally and temperamentally sound. They cannot bark, growl or be otherwise reactive if someone was to approach them. This also exists for their environment also - they cannot be reactive toward bikes, cars, other dogs, loud noises and the list goes on.

Finally, all assistance dogs need to be obedient, being controllable by you at all times. This obedience needs to be assessed by a Certificate III obedience trainer or higher.

WHAT ABOUT A PUBLIC ACCESS TEST?

Currently only certain states have an official public access test; **Victoria is not one of them.** It is still very helpful to check the other state's Public Access Tests as you train your dog to ensure you are covering all your bases (a link can be found here: https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/88655/pat-certification-handler-card-form.pdf) however you do not have to sign up with an agency to complete this. Instead, use it as a guide to help you prepare.

WHAT NOW?

Turn the page to find a list of services I offer that can help you become assistance dog certified.

Services I offer to help you achieve Victorian assistance dog standards

OPTION 1: ASSISTANCE DOG BOOT CAMP

What: Join my 4 day assistance dog boot camp. This course focuses on teaching your dog high levels of obedience, explaining the legalities of assistance dogs in Victoria, as well as teaching your dog their role for your diagnosed condition.

When: There is usually one course scheduled per year. My next course is March 17-20, 2025, 9am-3pm.

Cost: \$2,500

Upon completion of this course: If successful, your dog will gain an assistance dog in training certificate. This certificate provides identification to your dog as an in training assistance dog. As it is not yet a fully accredited assistance dog, it will not have automatic public access, however it is the first step to becoming fully certified. When you are ready you will need to complete 2x 3hr assessments with me (\$600) to gain your full certificate.

PLEASE NOTE: It is important that dogs attending this course are already temperamentally sound (i.e. non-reactive or nervous).

OPTION 2: OBEDIENCE

What: Join my 3 day intensive obedience course where I train high levels of obedience without the use of food and in the presence of high level distractions. This course teaches your dog to listen to you in all situations. High obedience levels are crucial for assistance dogs. Post course, I offer one day refresher courses for all previous graduates of my 3 day course to help maintain and extend their obedience if required.

When? The last 3 Sundays of most months. Several times a year I also do 3 days in a row.

Cost: \$660 is for the full 3 day course; \$50 is for the one day refresher course if required.

Why? Assistance dogs require high levels of obedience. They should respond and listen 100% of the time without needing food. They should be able to stay for an extended duration of time without moving; sit and drop on command; come when called; not jump; not bark; walk loosely on a lead; and be under your control at all times. Their obedience should be consistent no matter the situation or distractions present i.e. other dogs, people, sounds, places etc. Many people find this level of obedience difficult to achieve. My 3 day intensive course will help you. And my one day refresher courses are available if you need further assistance/would like them.

OPTION 3: DIY TEACHING ROLES

What: I provide you with a do it yourself assistance dog how-to-guide (explained further under the appendices page). This guide breaks down the most complex of tasks into achievable steps to teach your dog (i.e. how to teach your dog to create space in public, get the washing from the washer machine, pick up objects for you and more). The tasks included in this guide have been specifically chosen to allow for the training of most required tasks either by explicit examples or by learning how to apply the task to your specific needs. i.e. A specific task taught in the guide is how to teach your dog to provide deep pressure, an application you are taught is how to teach your dog to provide a mindful check in with you.

When: You work on these actions in your own time. Your dog may also innately be doing actions that help you without needing to be taught.

Cost: \$100.

Why: Part of an assistance dog certification is the need for your dog to complete tasks which you CANNOT do for yourself and which fill a need of your DIAGNOSIS (i.e. retrieving fallen items for someone who is mobility impaired; or creating space for someone who is psychologically triggered). Your dog cannot gain an assistance dog pass unless they can perform at least one action that aids your diagnosis. Three actions is better. You will also need your GP to sign off on this during the paperwork stage.

PLEASE NOTE: Assistance dogs take time to learn their roles. Dogs that have been trained by organisations are often in training for 2 years before being deemed an assistance dog for their owner. Be patient.

OPTION 4: ASSESSMENT

What: When you feel ready, we book in two sessions x 3hrs each to assess your dog's obedience, manners, temperament and ability to perform their roles for you.

When: You will need to book in a day with me when suits us both. Please ensure you have all required documentation prior to the day.

Cost: \$600.

PLEASE NOTE: Booking the above day with me does NOT guarantee that your dog will pass my assessment or gain PTV assessment. No refunds will be returned if your dog does not pass as it is your responsibility to ensure your dog is ready to be assessed and can meet the standards required.

Final Thoughts

And just like that, I hope you feel more empowered to understand the legal expectations around assistance dogs in Victoria.

Please take your time to read and re-read over the information I have included, and reach out if you have any questions, or would like to book in a particular service to aid you in your journey.

I wish you all the very best as you start/continue your journey,

Annie

Appendices

***A note on the Do It Yourself Guide to teaching your dog the tasks you require them to help you with.**

In the assistance dog training world, the most common method used to teach assistance dogs their specific skills is through a type of training called positive reinforcement/clicker/or food based training. Essentially, most assistance dog agencies teach their dogs how to perform certain actions (i.e. open doors; undress and dress a human; etc) through the use of a clicker and food-based rewards. They start with simple actions – how to follow a treat; how to touch a target; and how to perform basic actions. They then move through to more complex joined actions, and finally onto need-based actions (i.e. take the clothes out of the washer machine). My guide takes you on a journey through these steps.

In the first steps, your dog learns the basics of clicker training – how to target a stick; follow a lure; understand physical manipulation; etc. They do this through learning skills such as spin; look at me; sit; drop; shake; and others. These skills obviously are not the end goal (i.e. you won't be a successful applicant for assistance dog registration because your dog can spin in a circle). But it is an important first step in their journey as it teaches them how to learn, and it teaches you how to break down a skill to teach your dog.

Once they have mastered these skills, they move onto intermediate actions. These include, roll over, on your bed, march, crawl and others. **Again, these actions are not our end goal, instead the purpose of the intermediate actions are for our dogs to learn to join two or more actions together** (i.e. roll over includes the act of dropping and rolling; crawling includes the act of dropping and moving forward; march involves the actions of multiple hand shakes without needing a hand as present). Thus the dog is beginning to journey on their understanding of complex skills, and you are starting to learn more deeply how to pull apart an action in order to teach it.

After completing the intermediate actions, they move onto advanced level 1 and 2 actions. These include turning the light switch on, fetching the mail, bringing you a blanket, and playing dead, among others. **These are beginning to become more useful actions, though they are still not the end goal.** The point of the advanced level 1 and 2 actions are for your dog to start to learn basic complex skills (i.e. bringing you a blanket involves finding the blanket, picking it up, and bringing it to you; playing dead involves placing their hands up, waiting until the bang, laying down, and waiting until told to get back up, then getting back up). At this point, the dog is really starting to understand how to learn, and you will be beginning to see how to breakdown common tasks into smaller tasks so you can teach your dog what things you need to be done.

Remember, the aim of this guide is to help give you a method for you to use to teach your dog what you need. This is so you can consider your needs (i.e. I need my dog to be able to bring me items that I can't pick up for myself) and then know how to teach those actions to your dog. In the above example, the guide would teach you how to teach your dog to target a laser pointer. You would then decide to use this method (targeting a laser pointer) to teach them to pick up what you need and bring it back to you.

After finishing the advanced level 1 and 2 actions we move into the final stage of actions which include bringing you your drink from the fridge; opening doors; taking clothes out of the line; etc. These actions are again not really the goal. Instead, the goal is for you to understand the process that took you to these actions so as you can start teaching your dog the actions that you need them to do for you.

It is important to understand when purchasing this guide that I do not teach every action you are going to need (i.e. I don't include in the guide how to dress a human, take the washing out, etc). If I were to try include everything the guide would be 1000 pages long. Instead, I have chosen 33 different actions (from the most basic to the most complex) that will teach you the principles you need to be able to teach your dog yourself and make it personally applicable.

I'm going to say it again though, this will not be easy, and it will be a long process (hence, assistance dog organisation charge so much money because it is a huge endeavour even for them), but it is entirely possible if you are committed. **Because of this, I do not make any guarantees about this guide as it is entirely dependent on the owner who trains their dog.**

This guide comes in the format of a step-by-step written guide. There are 33 actions to learn – remember though, not each of these actions are assistance dog roles i.e. spin or play dead. Instead, the value of learning each of the actions (even those that are not assistance dog specific) is because they teach you how to break down tasks to teach your dog, and they teach your dog how to learn. This means, when you start applying what you are learning, you will be able to see a task (i.e. get my phone from my bed stand) and be able to break it down to teach your own dog (which is the whole point of do it yourself training).

The cost of this package is \$100 for the guide. It should be noted, my guide will **not** be useful for **medical alert dogs** (i.e. teaching your dog to alert you if your blood sugar levels are low; or you are about to have a seizure etc) as their jobs are taught differently.