



ASSISTANCE DOG BROCHURE

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



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PLEASE READ BEFORE CONTINUING.

In Australia the dog training industry is very much a grey area. In fact, when it comes to assistance dogs in Victoria, there is no registered training organisation that has state or federal authorisation to accredit an assistance dog – as you will soon see.

This does not mean we can't. It simply means, we are all using the same channels that you will need to use to accredit your assistance animal. Of course, there are many benefits to using assistance dog businesses – there's a lot of work that you will need to do to have your dog ready to be an assistance animal and a lot of paperwork to fill out also. It is also a major advantage to have an external agency provide you with identification. BUT a major drawback for using such services are: The often astronomical costs associated with these organisations; and/or the lack of available assistance animals they have - often the wait lists and wait times are long.

As a result, if you find yourself in the position where an assistance dog would aid your condition, but you do not have the funds or the ability to find an already trained assistance animal, you should know: It is entirely legal for you to train your own animal yourself, if you wish. I'm not saying it will be easy, but it is allowed.

Alternatively, if you have some funds available I currently have spaces available to help you train your own assistance animal by providing obedience, temperament, public exposure, PAT (public access) testing, role training (ie helping your dog know how to help you) and help with the paperwork and certification.

In the next few pages I am going to outline my services; provide you with the legal definition of assistance dogs; what it means for us in Victoria specifically – if you are in another state, please contact me as these guidelines are specific to Victoria's legislation only, and will endeavour to make clear the information of assistance dogs in Victoria. **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.

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.

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 condition you live with. In Victoria, these tasks cannot include helping you feel loved or valued. Instead, the legal requirement is that your dog provides a function that you need for a diagnosed condition you live with (i.e. 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). 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.

TRAINING 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/>

“The Public Access Test (PAT) establishes a minimum standard for an assistance dog’s behaviour in a public area under state and federal law.”

Taken from: www.assisteddogs.org.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/>

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

Let’s again start with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 cited to the left.

If you are living in Victoria, cross out point (b) as there is no government endorsed list of training organisations you must go through. Yes, there are organisations that train assistance animals, however they need to go through the same process as you do and fill out the same forms. It is however, definitely handy to use these agencies as they are familiar with how to fill out these forms and train dogs to meet the standards required; BUT they are not a necessity. If their cost is too high, they have no animals available, or you would just prefer to do the process yourself, you are able to train your own assistance animal. Your dog will still need to meet the standards required even if you train them yourself.

Next, if you are living in Victoria and have a small dog (one that fits in a bag) you can also cross out point (a) above as the only paperwork you can access from our state government, is a Public Transport Victoria Assistance Animal Pass - however these will only be issued if your dog does not fit in your bag. If your dog does fit in a carry bag, then you do not need a PTV Assistance Animal Pass as small dogs are already allowed to travel on public transport in Victoria. Again though, your dog will still need to meet the standards required of an assistance dog even if they are small. It therefore becomes extremely useful (though not a strict necessity) to have an external trainer provide you with certification if your dog is small as otherwise you have no “proof” to supply to venues if asked.

Finally, point (c) is a series of valid requirements in Victoria and will be necessary for your dog to meet, regardless of size or who you are training through/by yourself. Let's go through these one at a time:

1) 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.

2) 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.

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

4) 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. While they can be taught to ignore people, they cannot be otherwise aggressive/reactive. This also exists for their environment also - they cannot be reactive toward bikes, cars, other dogs, loud noises and the list goes on.

5) Finally, all assistance dogs need to be obedient, being controllable by you at all times i.e. your assistance dog should not run away from you, jump on others, or otherwise make a nuisance of themselves when in public.

WHAT ABOUT A PUBLIC ACCESS TEST?

Currently only certain states have an official public access test; **Victoria is not one of them.** Which means, your assistance animal does not need to complete the PAT to be registered as an assistance animal in Victoria. Oh, they definitely should be able to do everything on the PAT prior to your application, however there is no state-endorsed-PAT test for you to complete in Victoria. As a result, while it is very helpful to check the other state's Public Access Tests as you train your own 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.

Turn the page to find an outline from Victoria's only government accreditation on assistance dogs. I have included their guidance as stand-alone statements for simplicity.

STAND-ALONE STATEMENTS FROM PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA

Assistance animals need to be:

1.
Mobility Support;
Medical Alert; or
Psychiatric Service

“In Victoria assistance animals need to serve in at least one of the following capacities:

- **Mobility support animals** that help people with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs or have difficulty moving around;
- **Medical alert animals** that help people before and during a medical emergency; or
- **Psychiatric service animals** that help people with mental illness.

To receive a pass, you'll need to provide evidence that your assistance animal is trained to help you manage your disability, and meets high standards of hygiene and obedience.”

2.
More than emotional support

“Companion, therapy and facility animals are not considered assistance animals. House training and general obedience aren't enough to qualify your animal as an assistance animal.”

3.
Temperament, Obedience,
Manners, Hygiene and
Behaviour

Your assistance animal also needs 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.”

WHAT NOW?

In summary, I have shown you –

- Legally you are able to train your own assistance animal. It may be difficult, but it is possible.
- Organisations that train assistance animals are very useful and can make the process much easier; but they are often costly and don't always have animals available.
- Your assistance animal needs to meet a verified need of yours (i.e. they cannot be an assistance animal if they just make you feel good or you want to be able to take your dog with you to public places just because).
- Your assistance animal needs to be highly obedient, receptive to your voice, non-barking, non-aggressive and non-reactive, calm, and publicly well-mannered in all environments.

I will now outline a checklist of the items you will need to be able to demonstrate when you apply for your assistance animal pass in Victoria. I will do so by providing the do it yourself model first (i.e. how to achieve the standards by yourself). Following this, I will provide the same table, though I will outline services you can access through me which can help you achieve the standard. I choose to run my assistance dog training like a buffet where participants choose which elements they require help from and which they don't. I have found providing assistance dog training this way keeps the cost affordable and allows owners to choose what services they require vs what they can do themselves. Please understand that no course in Victoria is a guarantee that your dog will pass the assistance dog standards, and my course is no exception. Training assistance dogs requires a lot of time, effort, consistency and commitment on your part.

DO IT ALL YOURSELF

The following outlines briefly what has been discussed above, and breaks down what you need to do for your dog to become an assistance dog into 4 key areas: Obedience; Temperament and Public Exposure; their Role; and the Paperwork.

1. Obedience	2. Temperament and Public Exposure	3. Role	4. PAPERWORK
<p>Your dog needs to respond to you 100% of the time and do so without the use of food.</p> <p>Their obedience should be consistent no matter the situation or distractions present i.e. other dogs, people, sounds, places etc.</p> <p>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; toilet on command, and be under your control at all times.</p> <p>In the do it yourself model, you train your dog's obedience. This obedience is required to be at a much higher level than an ordinary pet.</p>	<p>Your dog needs to be non-reactive, confident with other dogs, people, sounds and experiences. Including public transport, busy cafes, streets, and parks etc. You should use another state's formal public access test as a guide - the Queensland Public Access Test is usually the most common for Victorian trainers to use.</p> <p>In the do it yourself model, you train your dog's socialisation experiences, non-reactivity and public experience. Your dog cannot be an assistance dog if they are reactive.</p>	<p>Your dog needs to perform at least one specific action that you medically require. You will need to receive a letter from your GP stating their belief that an assistance animal will benefit your condition. You need to be able to prove your dog can do these actions. Emotional support is not enough to gain an assistance dog certification.</p> <p>In the do it yourself model, you train your dog to perform specific actions that help your diagnosed condition and gain a GP referral that an assistance animal is necessary for you.</p>	<p>In the do it yourself model, you need to fill out the application form for Public Transport Victoria to receive a PTV assistance animal pass.</p> <p>If your dog is smaller than required for the PTV assistance animal pass, you source your own documentation (GP referral, identification card, and identification harness as a minimum).</p>

On the following page I outline services which I offer to help you achieve the Victorian assistance dog standards. You choose which services you would like help with.

Services I offer to help you achieve Victorian assistance dog standards

While it is entirely possible for you to train your own assistance dog in Victoria, there is a reason many don't. Namely, because it's incredibly difficult. If you need help achieving a certain standard, these are the services I provide which can help you achieve your goal. You can choose any from the list and I will help you with that area.

Obedience	Temperament and Public Exposure	*Role	4. PAPERWORK
<p>What: 3 day intensive obedience course without the use of food and in the presence of high level distractions. This courses teaches your dog to listen to you in all situations. Post course, I offer one day refresher courses for all previous graduates of my 3 day course to help maintain and extend their obedience.</p> <p>When? The last 3 Sundays of most months. Several times a year I also do 3 days in a row.</p> <p>Cost: \$660 is for the full 3 day course; \$50 is for the one day refresher course.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>What: Join my 5 day assistance dog course. This course focuses on 3 days of obedience, 2 days of testing around animals, the elderly, public, children, and busy environments., and instruction in understanding the legal requirements, care and framework of assistance dogs in Victoria.</p> <p>When: These courses usually run the first week of the Victorian School Holidays.</p> <p>Cost: \$1,760.</p> <p>Why? Assistance dogs require high levels of public exposure to ensure they have the right temperament and behave appropriately in public spaces. This course provides a large variety of public exposure experiences, teaches your dog to be neutral in these settings, and also proofs their obedience and focus on you instead of what is happening around them. This is a brilliant option to help you not only with their obedience, but also their public exposure.</p> <p>PLEASE NOTE: It is important that dogs attending this course are already temperamentally sound (i.e. non-reactive or nervous). The course merely gives them the experience and certificate which says they have been assessed as being sound.</p>	<p>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 (i.e. how to make your bed) into achievable steps to teach your dog. 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.</p> <p>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. If you would like me to provide assessment of these actions and help with the paperwork (read the next column) this is fine so long as when I come to assess these actions you have proof of this (i.e. video footage if unable to be replicated in the moment).</p> <p>Cost: \$100.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>What: We fill out the paperwork for Public Transport Victoria together (Please note you will need to organise the required referrals i.e. from your GP and have them sign the form once completed. I cannot do this for you). I also provide you with certification from my business for you in public settings (this is how all assistance dogs are identified – by individual businesses). I also provide you with assistance dog identification for use in public settings.</p> <p>When: You will need to book in a day with me when suits us both. This will allow me to assess your dog (as I will not help with the paperwork or provide certification if I have not assessed your dog as meeting the assistance dog standards). Once your dog has been assessed by me as meeting the standards we will sit down together at the end of that day and fill out the paperwork together. Please ensure you have all required documentation prior to the day.</p> <p>Cost: \$250 – assessment day + \$50 – paperwork help.</p> <p>PLEASE NOTE: All assistance dog organisations certify through the same way in Victoria (except Guide Dogs). That is, through their own business registration and by completing the Public Transport Victoria assistance animal pass. Booking the above day with me does NOT guarantee that your dog will pass my assessment or PTV. 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.</p>

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.