



Making the most of the human-canine relationship.

Assistance dogs vs therapy dogs

What's the difference?

Note: in Australia the terms "Service Dog" and "Emotional Support Dog/Animal" are not recognised.

	Assistance Dog	Therapy Dog
Purpose	A dog that assists a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of that disability	A dog that works together with a human handler to provide various therapeutic benefits to numerous people
Legal standing	<p>Australia-wide, the right of a person with a disability to be accompanied by an assistance dog is protected under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth).</p> <p>Each state and territory, to a greater or lesser extent, has regulations regarding assistance dogs.</p> <p>For example, in Queensland there is the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 (QLD) which addresses the rights of people with a disability to access public places with their assistance dog, regulates assistance dog training services, and provides the means to identify properly trained assistance dogs.</p> <p>Whereas in NSW, assistance dogs are briefly covered in the Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) and Transport for NSW has requirements for issuing an Assistance Animal Permit for travel on public transport with an assistance dog.</p>	<p>While therapy dogs may be assessed and "accredited" by various organisations (e.g. PAWS Pet Therapy, Delta Therapy Dogs), there is no federal or state legislation specifically concerning therapy dogs in Australia.</p> <p>Therapy dogs therefore come under the same regulations as other companion dogs. They have <u>no automatic right to access public places or other facilities</u>.</p> <p>The Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) allows for companion dogs (and therefore therapy dogs) to have access to public places and facilities where permission is granted by the person controlling that place/facility.</p> <p>It is therefore up to the individual or organisation controlling a facility to determine criteria for allowing dogs access.</p>



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Types	<p>Examples of assistance dogs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guide dogs that assist people who are vision-impaired• Hearing dogs that assist people who are hearing-impaired• Dogs that assist people with mental illness such as PTSD and anxiety• Dogs that assist people with limited mobility• Epilepsy and diabetic alert dogs	<p>There are two main categories of therapy dogs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dogs participating in <u>pet therapy</u> – typically handlers are volunteers and the team provides visits to facilities where people will benefit from interacting with a dog (e.g. hospitals, aged care, schools, etc.)• Dogs participating in <u>animal assisted therapy</u> – where the handlers are qualified professionals providing some form of therapy (e.g. psychologist, occupational therapist, etc.) and the dog is included to enhance the therapeutic process in some way.
Training	<p>In NSW, to be recognised as an assistance dog on the Companion Animals Register, a dog must have been “trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of that disability, and, to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour appropriate for an animal in a public place”.</p> <p>In other states, such as Queensland, there are legislated requirements for assessing and accrediting assistance dogs.</p> <p>In all cases, assistance dogs need to be under the effective control of their handler and typically perform one or more particular behaviours to alleviate the effects of a disability.</p> <p>Training of assistance dogs is therefore a time-intensive, specialised process. Owners are able to train their own dogs, but will usually require the support of an experienced trainer.</p>	<p>The most important consideration is that the handler has control of the dog and that the team is able to conduct interactions in a way that is safe for everyone involved.</p> <p>The therapy dog’s behaviour should be appropriate to the location – a rowdy, boisterous dog is not acceptable in a hospital or aged care facility (but may be fine with a group of older children outdoors).</p> <p>Basic pet dog training is usually sufficient for pet therapy dogs. More important is the dog’s temperament and eagerness to interact with people. There is a heavy responsibility on the handler to understand and always observe their dog, to be able to remove them from a situation that they find stressful.</p> <p>Dogs involved in animal assisted therapy may need specialised training if they are required to perform particular behaviours.</p>