



Position Statement on the Recognition of Assistance Animals Across Jurisdictions

Version: 1.0

Commencement Date: 23 July 2025

Review Date: 23 June 2026

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Citation:

Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA), "Position Statement on the Recognition of Assistance Animals Across Jurisdictions", Version 1.0 June 23, 2025,
www.workinganimals.com.au/guidance

Introduction

Assistance animals play a crucial role in enhancing the independence, mobility, and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. However, a significant barrier to global access for individuals relying on assistance animals is the lack of reciprocal recognition of assistance animals across jurisdictions. While some countries, such as Japan, only accept guide dogs, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States recognises only mini horses and dogs, this poses a serious challenge to the ability of people with disabilities to travel and access services internationally. In contrast, other essential tools for people with disabilities, such as disability parking permits, companion cards and Medicare, are widely recognised across borders, demonstrating that international recognition of support measures is not only feasible but necessary.

Furthermore, similar inconsistencies in the recognition and acceptance of assistance animals exist within countries, particularly in Australia, where states and territories impose varying rules and regulations concerning the types of animals recognized as assistance animals. This inconsistency creates significant challenges for individuals who rely on assistance animals for their daily functioning and independence.

Problem Statement

The inconsistency in the recognition of assistance animals globally and within countries presents a significant problem for individuals with disabilities. For instance, in Japan, guide dogs are the only accepted form of assistance animal, leaving people who rely on other animals, such as service dogs or miniature horses, without access to necessary services and public spaces. Similarly, in the United States, only dogs and miniature horses are recognized as legitimate assistance animals under the ADA, disregarding other animals that provide vital support, such as cats, rabbits, or pigs.

Within Australia, states and territories have differing rules about which animals are recognized as legitimate assistance animals. For example, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) recognizes ferrets as assistance animals, but they are not accepted in Queensland, where only a limited number of animals are recognized. Similarly, Queensland does not permit rabbits as assistance animals, a distinction that can leave individuals with specific needs unable to travel or access public spaces in other jurisdictions. The legal status of animals such as dingoes varies across states, with some states permitting their ownership under controlled conditions while others do not.

This lack of consistency not only hinders mobility and access but also infringes on the rights of individuals with disabilities by subjecting them to arbitrary regulations that do not take into account the vital support these animals provide. This patchwork approach creates confusion and discrimination, especially for individuals who move between states or territories or wish to access essential services while traveling.

Comparison to Disability Parking Permits and Medicare

The recognition of disability parking permits and Medicare across countries serves as a clear example of how international and domestic agreements can facilitate seamless access to services. Disability parking permits are often recognized across borders, allowing individuals with disabilities to park in designated spaces in different countries without needing a new permit.

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Similarly, Medicare, or equivalent health services, is widely recognized across countries for citizens of some nations, ensuring access to essential healthcare services. These examples demonstrate that international and national recognition of disability-related support systems is both feasible and beneficial, providing individuals with a better quality of life and greater autonomy.

Call for Action

It is imperative that both countries and domestic jurisdictions work together to create a global and national framework for the mutual recognition of assistance animals. Just as disability parking permits and Medicare are accepted internationally and across Australian states and territories, assistance animals should be recognized as legitimate support animals regardless of the country or state in which they are located. This would ensure that people with disabilities can travel freely and have consistent access to the support they need to live independently, regardless of their location.

At the national level, all states and territories should adopt uniform standards for the recognition of assistance animals. For example, states like Queensland, which do not currently recognize rabbits as assistance animals, must align their regulations with those of jurisdictions that accept a wider range of animals. Likewise, the recognition of ferrets in the ACT must be mirrored across the country, and policies regarding animals like dingoes should be standardized to prevent confusion and discrimination.

The development of such a framework would involve collaboration between state and federal governments to ensure that various types of assistance animals, including guide dogs, service dogs, miniature horses, and other animals that provide critical support, are universally recognized. By standardizing these regulations, jurisdictions can ensure that individuals with disabilities are not subject to inconsistent practices and are able to access public spaces and services with their assistance animals.

Conclusion

Global and national recognition of assistance animals is a critical step toward ensuring that individuals with disabilities can access the same rights and opportunities as everyone else, regardless of geographic location. By adopting a consistent international and domestic approach to recognizing assistance animals, we can promote inclusivity, mobility, and equality for people with disabilities worldwide. It is time for countries and states to work together to make this vision a reality.

Document Control

Version	Date	Author	Change Description	Approved By
V1.0	23/07/2025	V. Solomon	Initial	C.Williams

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