



Position Statement on the Involvement of Occupational Therapists (OTs) in the Selection,
Training, and Placement of Assistance Animals

Version: 1.0

Commencement Date: 23 July 2025

Review Date: 23 June 2026

Please note that printed and saved copies of this document are considered uncontrolled. For
the most up-to-date version, please visit www.workinganimals.com.au

For enquiries, please contact admin@workinganimals.com.au

Citation:

Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA), "Position Statement on the Involvement of
Occupational Therapists (OTs) in the Selection, Training, and Placement of Assistance Animals",
Version 1.0 June 23, 2025, www.workinganimals.com.au/guidance

Introduction

The integration of assistance animals into the lives of people with disabilities provides significant support in fostering independence, enhancing daily functioning, and improving quality of life. However, the process of selecting, training, and placing assistance animals is a complex one, which requires careful consideration of the individual's needs, abilities, and environment. Involving Occupational Therapists (OTs) in this process is essential to ensure that the selected animal is not only a practical solution but also a complementary element in the person's life. OTs, with their expertise in human functioning and environmental interaction, play a critical role in ensuring that the placement of an assistance animal is appropriate, sustainable, and beneficial.

Benefits of Involving OTs

- 1. Comprehensive Assessment of Needs:** OTs are trained to assess the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social needs of individuals with disabilities. They are uniquely qualified to identify which tasks can be supported by an assistance animal, taking into account the specific limitations and goals of the individual. This ensures that the animal is suited to the person's environment and lifestyle.
- 2. Personalized Recommendations:** An OT's involvement guarantees that recommendations for the type of assistance animal (e.g., guide dog, hearing dog, medical alert animal) are tailored to the unique requirements of the individual. The OT can match an individual with a suitable animal that will provide the greatest benefit in terms of independence and autonomy.
- 3. Safe and Effective Integration:** OTs can ensure that the training and placement of the animal are done safely and effectively. This includes working with trainers to ensure that the animal's training meets the specific needs of the person, as well as assessing the person's readiness to integrate an assistance animal into their daily life.
- 4. Holistic Approach to Disability Management:** Assistance animals can complement other interventions like medication, therapy, and environmental modifications. OTs are skilled at integrating these various forms of support, ensuring that the assistance animal is seen as a part of a larger rehabilitation or support plan.

Assistance Animals as a Last Resort

While assistance animals offer tremendous benefits, they should be viewed as a last resort, similar to a full bathroom modification. They are not a universal solution for every individual with a disability. The decision to integrate an assistance animal into one's life should be made after exploring all other avenues of support, including adaptive devices, environmental modifications, and other therapeutic interventions. Not all individuals will benefit from having an assistance animal, even if they express a desire for one. This is why a careful, thorough assessment by an OT is critical in determining if an assistance animal is the right choice.

Not Everyone Will Benefit from an Assistance Animal

The desire for an assistance animal can stem from various factors, including emotional attachment to animals or the perception that an animal will offer support. However, not all individuals with disabilities are suited for assistance animals, and not all animals will be suitable for every individual. The decision to place an animal should be based on a detailed assessment

Document Name:	PS-015-Involvement of OTs	Page:	2
Working Animals Federation of Australia		Version	V1.0

of the individual's needs, as well as the capacity of the person to care for and work with the animal. OTs can help determine if the integration of an assistance animal is a reasonable and beneficial solution, ensuring that expectations are realistic and that the placement is in the person's best interest.

Conclusion

The involvement of OTs in the selection, training, and placement of assistance animals is essential to ensure that the process is individualized and effective. Assistance animals should be seen as a powerful tool for promoting independence, but only when they are the right fit for the individual's needs and capabilities. By viewing assistance animals as a last resort, akin to a full bathroom modification, we can ensure that they are used judiciously and with the necessary support. The careful guidance of OTs helps ensure that individuals with disabilities receive the most appropriate interventions for their circumstances, enhancing their well-being and quality of life.

Document Control

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

Document Name:	PS-015-Involvement of OTs	Page:	3
Working Animals Federation of Australia		Version	V1.0