

# Common Assistance

## ANIMAL TERMINOLOGY



### THE FOLLOWING TERMS ARE COMMONLY USED IN THE AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCE ANIMAL INDUSTRY:

#### *Prospect:*

An animal who is undertaking basic obedience training with a view to progress to disability-specific and public access training. Animals are typically classed as a prospect until they reach 6 months of age, or have completed 6 months of foundation obedience training. This term is not recognised by legislation, however, a prospect should not be trained in public spaces where pets are not allowed. Depending on the animals ability they may progress through this stage faster or slower.

#### Assistance Animal in Training (AAiT):

An animal who has progressed from the status of prospect to the stage where it is receiving disability-specific and public access training. Animals are typically classed as an AAiT between 6 months to 2 years of age, or for 18 months of specific training prior to completion of a PAT. Depending on the animal's ability they may progress through this stage faster or slower. This term is not recognised by legislation, however, an AAiT should not be trained in public spaces until they have mastered basic obedience skills and a qualified, accredited and experienced trainer has assessed the animal as being suitable for training in areas where pets are not allowed.

## Assistance Animal (AA):

Once an AAiT passes a PAT, they are considered to be a fully-fledged Assistance Animal which are welcome to accompany their handler in all public places where pets are not allowed, with few exceptions. This is the overarching term which includes 3 categories of Assistance Animals, those being Guide, Hearing and Service Animals. Assistance Animal is the overarching term to refer to any type of Guide, Hearing or Service Animal as per Howell *et al.* (2022). Assistance Animals are recognised under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* and are considered to be a piece of Assistive Technology akin to a wheelchair, walking frame or walking stick. An Assistance Animal is NOT considered to be a pet.

## Public Access Test (PAT):

An Assistance Animal traditionally completes its first PAT at 2 years of age, or after 2 years of training. The PAT is then completed annually or semi-annually. The PAT is a basic assessment of the Handler Team's skills and ability to ensure public access requirements are met. Although not required by law, the PAT is considered to be best practice and is required by the Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) for all handlers. The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) requires that all handler teams attempt the PAT within 3 years of beginning training, and that a handler team pass each PAT within 3 attempts unless extenuating circumstances apply. Assistance Animals who are unable to do so must be 'washed' or retired.



## Public Access Rights:

Once an Assistance Animal completes its first PAT it can legally enter all public spaces where a pet cannot go. Exceptions to this include quarantine areas, food preparation areas and sterile surgical suites. Handlers who are prevented or refused access when accompanied by their Assistance Animal are able to make a complaint of discrimination to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) requires that an Assistance Animal pass a PAT every 12 -24 months to maintain public access rights.



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[workinganimals.com.au](http://workinganimals.com.au)

**Retired:** An Assistance Animal that is no longer able to work due to old age, injury, illness or inappropriate behavior is retired. This animal may live as a pet with its former handler or be rehomed as a pet. The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) requires that all Assistance Animals must be retired upon recommendation by 2 veterinarians and/or 2 professionally qualified, accredited and experienced trainers.

#### Washed:

An animal who 'washes out' is one that is cut from an Assistance Animal training program due to unsuitability at either the Prospect or AAiT stage. This animal may live as a pet with its former handler or be rehomed as a pet. The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) requires that all AAiT be washed if they are unable to complete the PAT within 3 years of commencing training, unless extenuating circumstances apply.



**Animal Guide:** An Assistance Animal whose primary function is to guide a handler who is considered to be legally blind. These animals are also known as Guide Dogs, Seeing-Eye Dogs or Dog Guides. Guide Animals are a category of Assistance Animal.



**Hearing Animal:** An Assistance Animal whose primary function is to guide a handler who is Deaf or hearing impaired. Hearing Animals are a category of Assistance Animal.

**Service Animal:** An Assistance Animal whose primary function is not as a Guide- or Hearing- Animal. This category includes Assistance Animals who aid individuals whose disability falls into any of the following sub-categories:

- Developmental, e.g. autism, down syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder
- Physical/Mobility, e.g. cerebral palsy, spina bifida, amputation
- Psychosocial, e.g. PTSD, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder
- Medical Alert, e.g. glucose (diabetes), allergy
- Medical Response, e.g. seizures
- Cognitive, e.g. dementia, intellectual disability

These animals have a variety of functions and associated names, however, Service Animals are a category of Assistance Animal.

**Handler Team:** This is the term used to refer to the Assistance Animal and handler/s working together as a team.

**Secondary Handler:** This is a person who assists the primary handler to handle or work their Assistance Animal. They may provide any form of aid necessary, including physical or verbal support. Secondary Handlers **MUST** be present when an Assistance Animal is in public with their primary handler.

**Primary Handler:** A Primary Handler (also known as a Handler) is a person with a disability which falls into the definition given under Part 4 of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* who owns and/or is accompanied by an Assistance Animal.

**Alternate Handler:** This is a person who assists the primary handler to handle or work their Assistance Animal. They may provide any form of aid necessary, including physical or verbal support. Secondary Handlers **MAY** be present when an Assistance Animal is in public with their primary handler.

**Prospective Handler:** An individual in the process of:

- Investigating whether an Assistance Animal will be beneficial for them,
- The handler of a prospect, or
- Awaiting placement of a Pre-Trained Assistance Animal.



**Trainee Handler:** An individual who is working with an AAiT with view to completing their first PAT. For a Pre-trained Assistance Animal, this is the phase where the AAiT and handler are first paired and in training to complete the PAT. For a Self-trained Assistance Animal, this is the phase where the AAiT is being trained to complete the PAT.

**Pre-Trained Assistance Animal:** An Assistance Animal who receives the majority of their training prior to being placed with its handler is known as a Pre-trained Assistance Animal. Once paired with a handler, the handler team receives joint training before passing a PAT.

**Self-Trained Assistance Animal:** An Assistance Animal who is paired with its handler prior to formal training is known as a Self-Trained Assistance Animal. As a team, the handler works with a professional trainer to take the animal through the stages of Prospect and AAiT before completing a PAT which qualifies the animal as a fully-fledged Assistance Animal.

## Trainer:

A trainer is responsible for assisting a Self-Training Assistance Animal handler to train the animal to the standard required for public access. In Australia, a trainer will typically hold a Certificate IV Animal Behavior and Training (or its predecessor Certificate 4 Companion Animal Services) and have suitable experience in training Assistance Animals. The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) offers industry membership to trainers allowing access to Assistance Animal accreditation and associated continuing professional development to maintain currency. A trainer may be known to the handler in a personal capacity without the Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) considering a conflict of interest, except in the case that the trainer is also acting as an assessor for a handler team. Where possible, the WAFA recommends that the trainer and assessor be separate individuals to maintain the high standards of the industry and avoid conflict of interest.



## PAT Assessor:

An assessor is responsible for administering a PAT. The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) requires that any conflict of interest be declared. The WAFA defines this as meaning the assessor must not have any family relationship or friendship with the handler team, nor have any financial or other interest in the success of a PAT, for example, an employee cannot conduct a PAT for a fellow employee of the same organisation. The WAFA requires that a PAT be conducted annually.

**Occupational Therapist (OT):** An OT works with a prospective handler to determine whether an Assistance Animal is the right fit for their lifestyle and circumstances. An OT may then prescribe an Assistance Animal and support the handler to integrate the animal into their life.



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