



# Assistance Dog Policy

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## **1 Introduction**

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### **1.1 Policy statement**

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 permits assistance dogs to accompany their owners into most areas of medical facilities, as a service user or an employee.

It is unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than other people, without justification, in areas such as service provision. In accordance with the [DDA Section 21](#), service industries are legally obligated to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access to their services. The DDA only recognises very limited circumstances in which there may be “justification” for treating a disabled person less favourably than other people.

### **1.2 Status**

This document and any procedures contained within it are non-contractual and may be modified or withdrawn at any time. For the avoidance of doubt, it does not form part of your contract of employment.

### **1.3 Training and support**

Dounby Surgery will provide guidance and support to help those to whom it applies to understand their responsibilities under this policy. Additional support will be provided to managers and staff to enable them to deal more effectively with matters arising from this policy.

## **2 Scope**

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### **2.1 Who it applies to**

This document applies to all employees of Dounby Surgery and other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation, such as agency workers, locums and contractors.

Furthermore, it applies to all clinicians working at the surgery, who may or may not be employed by Dounby Surgery.

### **2.2 Why and how it applies to them**

Dounby Surgery aims to design and implement policies and procedures that meet the diverse needs of our service and workforce, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others, in accordance with the [Equality Act 2010](#). Consideration has been given to the impact this policy might have in regard to the individual protected characteristics of those to whom it applies.



## **3 Guidance**

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### **3.1 Requirement**

Dounby Surgery is committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community. To that effect, assistance dogs are welcome.

Assistance dogs may also be in training and visits to public spaces will be part of their training. Therefore, dogs under training may also be permitted to attend along with their walker or sponsor. This “owner” may not be disabled.

Dogs that are not assistance dogs are not permitted entry to the organisation.

### **3.2 Definition of assistance dog**

As noted above, it is unlawful to refuse access to a disabled person accompanied by an assistance dog except in the most exceptional circumstances. It is therefore important for Dounby Surgery staff to check that the dog meets the recognised criteria to be classed as a bona fide assistance dog.

Assistance dogs may be trained by charities that specialise in this work or by the owners themselves.

Assistance dogs (UK) is the umbrella organisation for charities that train assistance dogs that have been assessed and accredited against the standards set out by the International Guide Dogs Federation (IGDF) and/or Assistance Dogs International (ADI). Some owner-trained dogs are supported by AD(UK) charities, based on the ADI standards. For these dogs, owners will carry an AD(UK) card and the AD(UK) logo will usually be visible on the jacket of the dog (see appendix 1).

Owner-trained dogs, or dogs from non Assistance Dog (UK) organisations, do not have nationally recognised standards that they work to. Many owner-trained assistance dog partnerships will follow similar guidance regarding the training required to meet the international standard and some will have been accredited by independent groups or dog trainers. However, since there are no agreed training standards for this group, it is harder to be sure of the level the dog and patient are working to and that the necessary health checks and insurance are in place. There are plans in place to introduce an independent assessment process for owner-trained and non-AD(UK) trained dogs in the future and this protocol will be updated at that point.

### **3.3 Policy**

There are four key questions that health care professionals should they ask when making arrangements for an assistance dog to enter a health care setting:

**i. Is the dog a registered assistance dog with AD(UK) or can the owner provide assurance that the dog is suitably trained?**



If so, you can expect that the dog:

- is highly trained
- will not wander freely around the premises
- will sit or lie quietly on the floor next to their owner
- will not display reactive behaviours towards humans or other animals such as growling, snarling, lunging or biting
- will not show continuous signs of fear such as crouched body, tail tucked under, ears flat back, jumping up or constant soliciting of attention from members of the public
- is trained to go to the toilet on command and so is unlikely to foul in a public place
- is vaccinated in line with current recognised international standards of best practice (Titre testing is no substitute for vaccination)
- has a comprehensive routine parasite prevention to protect against fleas, worms and other transferable organisms
- is not fed on raw food
- is covered by specific assistance dog insurance for public liability cover.

If the dog is not a registered assistance dog with an AD(UK) organisation then Dounby Surgery staff should ask for evidence of the following.

- The training and temperament/behaviour testing that the dog has been through.
- Vaccinations: dogs must be vaccinated against distemper, parvovirus, and hepatitis, according to the manufacturer's guidelines. An annual vaccination for leptospirosis is also required. The owner should be able to show signed veterinary certificates for these vaccinations (Titre testing is no substitute for vaccination).
- Parasite prevention: the owner should treat the dog to prevent fleas, ticks and worms on a regular cycle. Where a topical ectoparasite treatment (back of the neck ointment) is used, this can cause an unpleasant odour and, in some cases, a rash if someone strokes the dog after the drops have been administered into the coat. In such instances, dogs should not visit health care environments for 48 hours after product use. It should be noted that orally administered alternatives are available. Owners should be able to provide evidence of parasite prevention in the form of a written record.
- Owners should be aware that if visiting health care settings dogs should not be fed on raw animal protein although raw vegetables are acceptable.
- Public liability insurance which is suitable for health care settings.

The majority of owner-trained assistance dogs will be happy to show you evidence that they have met the standards above, thereby ensuring that the dog is suitable to be working safely in a wide range of environments. This may include evidence of dog training sessions undertaken over a significant period of time.

Dounby Surgery staff should also feel comfortable to ask for any dog to be removed from the setting if it does not meet the expectations listed above for dogs trained by Assistance Dogs (UK) members.

## **ii. What role does the dog fulfil for that person (i.e. what needs does the dog meet)?**

The health care professional should understand the person's individual needs and the role the dog plays in meeting those needs. If the dog is not able to be present, these are needs for which they are likely to require some support. For example, where the dog is a

medical alert assistance dog, it may be prudent to allow the assistance dog prolonged access in order to monitor the patient's health status.

**iii. What is the reason for the patient being in the surgery environment and how does the presence of a dog impact on this and others present?**

The health care professional should satisfy themselves that the surgery environment and activities to be undertaken by the dog do not pose an unacceptable level of risk to the person, others present, or the dog.

**iv. Who will be supporting the dog when it is in the medical environment (particularly if this cannot be the patient themselves)?**

The health care professional should understand who has responsibility for the dog when it is in the surgery. In all cases, health care staff are not expected to care for the assistance dog and it is the responsibility of the person (or their nominated representative) to ensure that the assistance dog is exercised, fed, toileted and cared for.

Assistance dogs are able to enter most areas of the surgery. For infection control purposes, the treatment room areas are not permissible for any assistance dog to enter. In these circumstances, the owner will be requested to ensure that alternative arrangements are made for the short period whilst they are receiving treatment. In these instances, the patient should be advised that it is our wish to minimise any separation time from their dog.

### **3.4 Maintaining infection control measures**

There are three key areas where guidelines are important in making an appropriate risk assessment for a visit:

**i) Infection prevention control**

All precautions should be taken to ensure that any possible risk of infection being passed from owner or dog to other patients is minimised. There is no published data suggesting outbreaks or incidences of infection occur as a result of dogs but there is evidence about how to reduce risk (Murthy R, et al., (2015) and Stull J, et al., (2015)). The following should be observed at all times.

- If the dog is unwell with diarrhoea and vomiting or have had diarrhoea and vomiting in the last 48 hours, they should not visit. This also applies to respiratory symptoms such as a cough and cold.
- If the dog develops a skin condition, advice should be sought from the local infection prevention and control team as to whether the dog should attend.
- The dog should have all their routine vaccinations and these must be up to date.
- The dog should not be allowed to lick anyone, in particular, not near a person's face.
- Hand hygiene should be maintained. The owner/handler, the patient and anyone who has contact with the dog must clean their hands with soap and water, sanitiser or alcohol rub.
- The dog should be cleaned and well-groomed before any visit.
- The dog should not be fed on raw animal protein although raw vegetables are acceptable.



## **ii) Allergy management**

Allergy to dogs is relatively common and dog allergen can be found in public places, being carried on the clothing of pet owners and pet contacts. The dog dander is present in the fur, skin and saliva. As dogs groom themselves the saliva remains on the fur until it dries and becomes aerosolized into a powder, which can then become airborne and inhaled. Concentrations of dog allergen have been demonstrated to be significantly higher in upholstered seats and carpets in public buildings, and on public transport, than in homes without a dog (Custovic A et al., (1996)).

As it is not easily possible to identify people with a dog allergy who are sitting in the waiting area, it would seem reasonable to exclude therapy dogs from waiting areas. If it is essential that a dog should be with an individual, then a risk assessment should be undertaken. The following should be observed at all times.

- Before an assistance dog is brought into the surgery, the clinician in charge should be consulted with regard to whether there are patients, visitors or staff present with a significant dog allergy.

Whilst any assistance dog is on the premises, the organisation will pay particular attention to the maintenance of infection control.

If necessary, should there be any animal body fluids that need to be cleared, this should be treated as the normal procedure as for human waste. Personal protective equipment should be worn and cleaning undertaken in accordance with the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual.

Following attendance by an assistance dog to the organisation, the cleaning staff are to be made aware of any areas that the assistance dog visited. This will enable them to provide a higher level of cleaning to these areas.

## **iii) Health and safety**

The policies of the practice should be followed. Particular care should be taken to reduce any risk of harm to the dog and its owner/handler, patients and visitors, as well as staff. To ensure this, the following should be observed at all times.

All dogs:

- all attendances must be agreed in advance
- should be on a lead and under control at all times
- should be wearing its ID tag, a recognised jacket, or other identification, to show that it is working as either an assistance or therapy dog
- people other than those the dog is with must be actively discouraged from talking to the dog. The owner/handler and surgery staff must be able to stop any interaction immediately if they think there are any risks to anyone, including the dog
- consideration should also be given to cultural and religious beliefs and people who are frightened of dogs or do not wish to interact with a dog. Any unplanned interactions must be prevented.
- it is of paramount importance that the dog must never be left alone with anyone other than their owner/handler.



- the owner/handler must remove a dog from any situation where they consider the dog to be at risk and be able to read their own dog's body language, to ensure that the dog remains comfortable at all times during a visit

### **3.5 Clinicians' responsibilities**

Physical contact with a dog by clinical staff will be resisted during any consultation or examination.

All clinical staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water prior to contact with an assistance dog, this will ensure the safety of the dog. All clinical staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water after any contact with an assistance dog to ensure the safety of other patients.

Clinical staff are be mindful following any attendance of an assistance dog that they then consider other patients in their surgery list for that session who are potentially adverse clinically to the presence of dogs.

This may include patients who:

- Have an allergy to animals, especially dogs
- Are immunosuppressed
- Have a phobia of dogs
- Another medical reason

### **3.6 Non-clinicians' responsibilities**

Other staff are to ensure that following any physical contact with the assistance dog they also promote good hand hygiene.

### **3.7 Owner's responsibilities**

The owner has a responsibility to ensure that their assistance dog is well behaved and supervised throughout the visit.

Additionally, they are to ensure that their dog:

- Is physically fit before visiting the organisation. If pets become ill, diagnosis and treatment by a vet must be sought
- Is kept on a lead throughout the visit and is clearly identified as an assistance dog
- Is discouraged from jumping, scratching and licking
- Does not come into contact with open wounds
- Is of an acceptable hygienic standard, i.e. not wet, muddy etc.
- Is exercised and has had its toileting and feeding requirements met
- Has claws trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches

- Is regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness
- Has received the relevant inoculations and is wormed on a regular basis

## **4 Employees with an assistance dog**

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### **4.1 Requests**

As Dounby Surgery have a responsibility to our existing employees, should a member of staff suddenly need or be considering the need to apply for an assistance dog, their application must be discussed with the practice manager at the earliest opportunity.

The practice manager will seek advice from the occupational health team and a work place assessment is likely to be required.

The same principles will apply to any new starting employees.

Prior to any assistance dog arriving with the employee, arrangements will be made with the relevant charity to carry out appropriate training with other organisation staff.

### **4.2 Employee's responsibilities**

To ensure that day-to-day operational activity is not affected at the organisation, the employee and assistance dog owner will be required to ensure that their dog is well behaved at all times.

An employee will not be granted extra paid time away from their position to exercise their dog. This would normally be expected to be conducted during any break or unpaid if during working hours.

## **5 Summary**

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While the organisation has a responsibility towards the person who requires an assistance dog, it has additional needs to ensure that both other patients and staff are also considered.

Therefore, a risk assessment should be carried out that promotes compliance with DDA legislation whilst also complying with both IPC and HASAW requirements.