

Guide Dogs Australia Guide and Assistance Dog Access Refusal by Taxi and Rideshare Statement

“Guide Dogs Australia calls on government, taxi and rideshare operators and drivers to take immediate action and adopt a suite of measures to eliminate the unlawful and discriminatory practice of guide and assistance dog access refusals” by drivers of taxis and rideshare vehicles.

Purpose

Refusing a person access because they are using a guide dog is unlawful under the federal Disability Discrimination Act (1992). The number of access refusals remains acute in the taxi and rideshare sector, with the number of incidents remaining stubbornly high despite discrimination claims being brought, state and national lobbying and education campaigns and increased penalties.

Guide Dogs Australia (GDA) has consulted extensively to develop an action list with the below suite of measures designed for the elimination of this pervasive and overt discrimination.

Statement

Real reform requires co-design, transparent systems, and measures of success across all stakeholders including regulators, enforcement bodies, rideshare and taxi operators as well as the driver and customer community. Guide Dogs Australia calls on operators and government to commence the following immediate actions:

Rideshare and Taxi Operators

- Change Booking systems: current practices should not require the declaration of an assistance animal as part of the service order. These end to end booking systems should be made accessible.
- Operators must file a report with the regulatory body addressing its actions to eliminate discrimination and refusals. The regulatory body needs to publish this also on a quarterly basis.
- Further, operators are to take these actions and ensure accessibility for the complainants, including how to make a complaint and the investigation framework with timeframes and guarantees for clear feedback on the action taken in relation to their complaint.

- Driver accreditation and training: Taxi and rideshare companies will clearly state in their driver licensing obligations that they must carry passengers who are blind or have low vision whether they have a guide dog mobility aid. Drivers must specifically agree to carry guide and assistance dogs in their vehicle via selecting a checkbox or providing their signature before being accepted on to a taxi or rideshare platform.
- Taxi and Rideshare companies must implement blindness and low vision awareness training annually by people with lived experience with this training to be refreshed in a timely manner.
- Taxi and rideshare companies will state prominently that they are responsible for providing a cover/mat for any assistance dog to rest on while travelling in a vehicle, and that they, the driver, are solely responsible for cleaning any residual dog hair.

Governments and its Regulatory and Enforcement Authorities

- The Australian government must strengthen discrimination legislation and work to harmonise laws across states and territories providing a positive duty on operators with taxi and rideshare companies and drivers facing robust penalties for this illegal practice.
- Increase transparency, ensure benchmarked improvements of taxi, and rideshare operations occur. Implement mandatory reporting of assistance dog refusals to the state regulatory body published on a quarterly basis by every taxi and ride share company. Failure to comply results in heavy fines.
- Regulatory bodies to provide accessible guidelines on required evidence to prosecute drivers and companies on behalf of individuals for refusing to transport a passenger who is blind or has low vision and their assistance or guide dog.
- To further equitable access, governments should implement all Rideshare vehicles to display registration information in braille and tactile print on a standardised location on the vehicle for example, on the passenger side rear door. This measure will ensure riders can identify that they are getting into the correct booked vehicle.

END.