

Guide Dogs.

Designated Outside Toileting Areas for Guide Dogs

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Guide Dogs

A Guide Dog is a highly trained assistance animal. It has rights of access to all public premises when working alongside its handler who is blind or has low vision. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has been providing services to people who are blind or have low vision for over 60 years. We have skill and expertise in providing the most appropriate advice for outdoor toileting areas for Guide Dogs.

In most circumstances, ensuring there are plenty of well-maintained, safe and accessible grass areas suitable for toileting a Guide Dog in public spaces can be enough to support a person who is blind or has low vision to care for their dog's basic needs. However, safe and accessible grassed areas suitable for toileting a Guide Dog are becoming less common in many cityscapes and developments. This document describes why building or allocating a designated dog toileting area can benefit people who are blind or have low vision, and the design elements that should be considered to maximise accessibility.



Why provide designated toileting areas on your premises?

- Guide Dogs need the opportunity to toilet regularly to ensure they are comfortable and hygiene standards are met.
- Lack of easy access to safe toileting areas could impact work, lead to embarrassing accidents or unnecessary risks (such as additional road crossings) for the handler.
- Provision of a safe space to toilet an assistance animal is one way to improve access and welcome visitors with a disability who use a Guide Dog or other assistance animal.

Please note, that regardless of whether a designated toileting area is provided, assistance animals handlers should still be able to exercise choice in regards to where they toilet their dog. You cannot enforce use of an area, but you can make it as accessible and functional as possible to encourage use.

Designated toileting areas can be inside or outside. This document covers outside toileting areas only.

Provision of Outdoor Toileting areas for Guide Dogs

A designated outdoor toileting area should include the following suggested elements:

Wayfinding principles

Easily locatable



- Construct the designated toileting area near entry/exit points or other obvious landmarks, such as public toilets to ensure it is easier to find.
- Ensure that a continuous accessible path of travel to the designated toileting area is wide enough for two dogs and two people to walk comfortably side-by-side (recommended 2.5–3.0m width as per Transport for NSW findings). Note: Although this width is ideal, it may not be possible in a lot of locations
- Maintain paths to ensure they are free from obstacles and overhead obstructions.

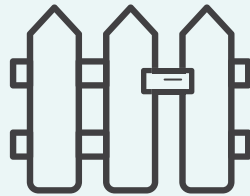
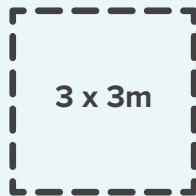
Easily identifiable



- Provide clear signage leading to, and at the entry to, the toileting area noting that the area is a designated area for use by people with assistance or therapy animals only.
- Signage should include use of universal images, raised lettering and Braille.
 - All Braille/Tactile signage should be positioned at a height between 1200mm and 1600mm on a non-reflective surface with high luminance contrast between the lettering and background.
- Signage is clearly visible.
 - Luminance contrast between the sign and the background (the environment/ wall behind the sign) should be greater than 30%.

Design and Dimensions

The designated toileting area must provide enough room to allow a person and their Guide Dog to move about freely and safely. The area does not need to be fenced/enclosed, but if so, the following advice may be useful.



Allow for an area ideally of 3x3 metres up to 5x5 metres (note: a square shape is not required). A larger space can also be created, being mindful that a larger space can increase the chances of a person who is blind or has low vision becoming disoriented.

If space does not permit a 3x3, the smaller size should consider room for the person to move safely as well as the Guide Dog having enough space to move freely to encourage toileting. Usually the Guide Dog likes to toilet away from their handler.

Provide an **accessible gate** with a simple open/close mechanism and ensure the latch is a contrasting colour to the structure. Consider which way the gate opens and closes in relation to area, e.g - parallel to footpath or perpendicular to footpath. Allow appropriate space for opening and closing and circulation space. Usually dog pens/runs open inwards to minimise the chance of dog escapes.

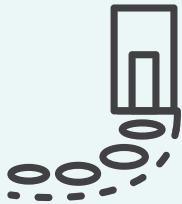
If space permits, you may consider a double gate system to help improve the security.

Fencing should be above 1200mm and should be constructed so that a clear line of sight can be maintained between the inside of the area and the surrounding environment for safety.

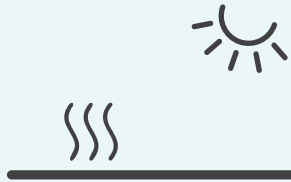
The fence height will prevent the likelihood of a dog jumping out - or in.

Ground Surface

The designated area and any approach to it should be an even surface, clear of obstacles and trip hazards with clearly defined boundaries.



Ensure a **continuous accessible path** of travel leads to the designated area.



Consider **ground surface** inside the designated area

- Natural grass is an ideal ground cover.
- Surfaces other than grass may be hard to keep clean and could be uncomfortable on a dog's paws as many synthetic or hard surfaces may radiate additional heat.
- A combination of both hard and grass surfaces may be suitable.
- Drain pits must not be located inside the designated area.
- Other potentially hazardous structures, must not be located inside the designated area.
- Ensure no drop offs are present at the edges of the space reserved for toileting of assistance animals.



Grass and plants offer stimulation for a dog to toilet. Any shrubs, trees, bushes and furniture should only be present if they are on the border of the designated toileting zone, remembering:

- Some plants may be toxic to dogs.
- Dropped leaves/ seeds and tree roots may become a trip hazard.
- Where possible, keep vegetation outside of the fenced area.

Additional considerations



Consider providing a **garbage bin** inside the designated toileting zone or directly outside within arm distance from the gate latch and on a level surface.

Also consider providing a **toilet bag dispenser** beside the bin.



If possible, install a **water source** inside the area (preferably the water structure will have an easily emptied bowl at the base and erected on a level surface).

If installing a tap ensure it is placed at a height and in a location where it will be not be a hazard, can be easily used and has appropriate contrast to the surrounding environment.

If a hose is required to clean the area, ensure that it doesn't create a hazard. It is best not to leave the hose inside the fenced area.



If possible, provide **weather protection**, such as an umbrella, shade cloth or awning or non deciduous trees adjacent to and over the designated toileting zone.



Maintenance

- Dogs instinctively pull towards grass when they need to toilet. We strongly recommend providing a well-maintained, natural grass option in the designated toileting zone.
- Schedule regular maintenance to ensure cleanliness, hygiene and safety
 - remove thorny weeds, such as bindii
 - clean bins and water bowls regularly
- Carefully consider the use of alternative ground surfaces if natural grass cannot be used.
 - Some surfaces such as synthetic turf, sand, dirt and concrete can be too hot on the dog's paws, especially if the area is in full sun.
 - Dirt can become muddy/slippery in wet weather and dusty in heat.
- Ensure area is well ventilated.

Further information

If you have any questions or need further support, please do not hesitate to contact Guide Dogs NSW/ACT via access@guidedogs.com.au.

When you create a designated assistance animal toileting zone that is safe and accessible for people and their Guide Dog please send us a photo and let us know. We'd love to hear from you.

*** This document is specific to Guide Dog relief areas. There are many instances where people will be accompanied by an assistance animal and while many of the above points will benefit them, people with differing mobility needs, such as people who use wheelchairs for example, may have additional requirements, e.g. circulation space, gradient of path and minimum width of gate. Consideration relating to all potential users of the zone in your overall design and development of relief areas for assistance animals will help to make the areas accessible for all.**



Guide Dogs and the law

1. Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

Federal legislation that eliminates, as far as possible, discrimination against a person with a disability on the ground of disability in various areas, including: work, accommodation, education, access to premises, clubs and sport.

2. Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW)

3. Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)

4. Domestic Animals Act 2020 (ACT)

5. Domestic Animals (Accredited Assistance Animal Public Access Standards) Determination 2020

6. Australian Human Rights Commission

7. Anti-Discrimination NSW

8. ACT Human Rights Commission

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