

Guide Dogs.

Guide Dog Mobility Information Pack.



What is Guide Dog Mobility?

Guide Dogs are highly trained assistance animals. Their skills and temperament meet the International Guide Dog Federation's standards for supporting the independent mobility of people who are blind or have low vision. A person who works with a Guide Dog is called a Guide Dog Handler. Together, the Handler and Guide Dog form a special partnership, each playing a vital role in achieving the best mobility outcomes.

A Guide Dog can:

- Assist the Handler to avoid obstacles in their immediate path.
- Stop at changes in surface level, such as kerbs or steps.
- Locate destinations they have been taught to find.

A Guide Dog cannot:

- Assess traffic flow and decide when it is safe to cross the road.
- Guide to any destination in a new location. (A Guide Dog is not a GPS; it must be trained to target new objectives such as landmarks or buildings.)

A Guide Dog Handler should:

- Care for the dog's basic needs, such as:
 - Provide food and water.
 - Ensure a safe and secure place for the dog to rest and exercise.
 - Conduct regular health checks and grooming.
- Be prepared to welcome a Guide Dog into the family home, providing it with access to communal areas of the home and ensuring the dog is an integrated member of the household.
- Develop a working understanding of dog behaviour and positive reinforcement to maintain their Guide Dog's training.
- Have an acceptable level of orientation and mobility skills, including the ability to make safe road crossing decisions.
- Be committed to maintaining and developing the Guide Dog's skills by reinforcing their training and maintaining a routine, especially in the early stages of the partnership.

How does a dog become a Guide Dog?

At Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, staff and volunteers are committed to all stages of a Guide Dog's life. Guide Dogs are purpose bred to inherit good health and temperament. Our puppies are born in a family home, and our Breeding and Whelping Advisors support their growth and development.

They are socialised with their litter mates and mother and participate in specially designed programs until they are eight weeks old. They then move to a Puppy Raiser's home, where they live for 12 months.

These Puppy Raisers, supported by our Puppy Development Advisors, give our dogs love and care while teaching basic skills and ensuring the dogs attend regular training and socialisation sessions.

Once a dog reaches 14 months old, they return to the Guide Dog Centre for assessment and training. They then spend five months in an intensive program where the Guide Dog Trainers develop their confidence and skills.

How could Guide Dog Mobility help me?

A Guide Dog may provide faster and more fluid mobility through complex environments such as crowded areas, giving you greater confidence and less stress when navigating to destinations. A Guide Dog can locate various objects for you, such as doors, shop counters and poles for light assisted crossings. They can also maintain a straight line of travel, for example, when crossing the road or supporting you to align with access ramps.

Who can get a Guide Dog?

A person with significant vision loss who requires a primary mobility aid, such as a long cane, to travel independently and safely could be a suitable applicant for Guide Dog Mobility. Applicants must be physically fit enough to provide the dog with the required exercise and care. They also need to be willing and motivated to put in the effort needed to learn how to work as a team.

How do I apply for a Guide Dog?

At Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, anyone considering Guide Dog Mobility is asked to read the Guide Dog Information Pack (this document) to find out more about how a Guide Dog might fit into their life.

Additionally, free Guide Dog Information Sessions and Guide Dog Experience Days run throughout the year. You can attend these events to learn more about Guide Dog Mobility and decide if a Guide Dog is the right fit for you.

Visit our website to [register your interest in our next Guide Dog Information Session or Experience Day](#). Further information is available on page six of this information pack under the heading: “What are the next steps?”.



Assessment process.

A Guide Dog Orientation and Mobility Assessment will be conducted by a qualified Guide Dog Mobility Instructor (GDMI). The GDMI will typically complete your assessment in two parts:

- **Part one** is usually conducted over the phone by telepractice. We will ask questions about your lifestyle, mobility needs and capacity to care for the welfare of a Guide Dog. This part of the assessment usually takes around two hours.
- **Part two** is completed in person. During this stage, the GDMI will visit your home to assess its suitability for a Guide Dog. You'll need to demonstrate your mobility skills along a travel route of your choice. Ideally, this route should include a variety of environmental challenges that reflect the travel skills you'll need a Guide Dog to possess. These skills might include:
 - road crossings;
 - negotiating stairs;
 - uneven ground surfaces;
 - negotiating obstacles; and
 - locating destinations.

The GDMI will likely ask you to set aside two hours for this part of the assessment. With your consent, they will take video footage of your travel, which will be reviewed to help match you with a dog that suits your gait, speed and mobility needs if your application is approved.

You can withdraw your application at any time without penalty.

Once your assessment is completed, the assessing GDMI will make a recommendation to our internal panel on the outcome: either to proceed to Guide Dog Mobility or decline your application. If your application is declined, we will provide you with feedback and suggestions to help you improve your application should you choose to reapply in the future. You also have the right to appeal a decision if you disagree with the outcome.

If your application is approved, your GDMI will begin writing any required reports to support funding applications. Regardless of the outcome, you will receive a written response from us.

Finding the right match.

Once your application is approved, you'll be placed on our Guide Dog Priority Waiting list. We will then review your application alongside the profiles of the qualified dogs to find the best match for your needs. You'll be notified as soon as we identify a suitable match.

Funding.

There are several ways to fund a Guide Dog and your training costs. Options may include the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA), My Aged Care (MAC), or donor funding. Staff at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT will provide the support and documents you need to apply for funding you're likely to be eligible for once you're approved for a Guide Dog.

What does Guide Dog Mobility training involve?

How long does training take?

Once you have been matched to a Guide Dog, your GDMI will contact you to arrange a time to start your training. Training programs are tailored to each individual's needs; however, they typically run for three to four weeks. To achieve the best possible outcome during this training period, you'll need to be available each weekday.

Where does training take place?

Training can take place either at your home or in a residential class program at a motel. If you choose the residential setting, you'll spend a portion of your program training with other handlers in a suitable hotel or motel before continuing with individualised training at home for the remaining time needed to achieve your goals. In a residential program, all accommodation and meals are provided at no cost to you, thanks to donor funding. You're also welcome to invite a friend or family member to stay with you for one night during your stay.

How do I best plan for training?

It is important to understand that there is a critical time in the early stage of training when you'll need to clear your calendar. During this time, you'll be asked to refrain from having visitors in your home to help your dog's transition and establish your bond. If this is difficult to do due to a dynamic home life or other commitments, it may be advisable to opt for a class training program, so you can devote the necessary time to bonding and training.

We recognise that the training period is intensive and may require some planning on your part. To support this, we always provide at least four weeks' notice before training begins. You can let us know at your assessment or any time afterward if you have commitments that prevent you from training on specific dates.

What does the training focus on?

Training will focus on achieving your goals while introducing you to Guide Dog Mobility. You'll learn the unique and specific commands, positions, and cues needed to work efficiently with your dog. Additionally, you'll learn how to care for your dog using positive reinforcement, manage unwanted behaviours, and navigate various environments and situations to develop your handling skills.

Do I receive any equipment with my Guide Dog?

When your dog arrives, you'll receive a starter equipment pack that includes food, bedding, bowls, a lead, a collar, a harness, grooming tools and other essential items. At the completion of your program, you will be issued with a Guide Dog Passport, access rights cards, and your Guide Dog's medallion. These items will support you if you encounter any issues accessing services or premises.

What happens after my initial training?

Following your initial training, you'll continue to receive support and training through our in-person follow-ups. These will occur at one, three, six, and 12 months in the first year, then annually until your dog turns eight. After your dog turns eight, in-person follow-ups will occur every six months until your dog retires. Additional training and support include aftercare programs if you need help addressing a behavioural issue with your dog, as well as orientation and mobility training if you need to learn a new route or destination.



Rights and responsibilities.

Legal rights.

Guide Dogs are assistance animals and are legally allowed to accompany their Handlers to all public services or premises under Federal and State-based laws. Exceptions apply if your dog does not meet access and hygiene standards or if the location has conditions related to infection control, public health, or quarantine. In NSW and ACT, fines apply if someone refuses access to a Handler due to the presence of their Guide Dog. You will learn more about the law and how to self-advocate during your Guide Dog training program.

What are the next steps?

Guide Dog Mobility offers many benefits. While training with a Guide Dog can be emotionally and physically challenging, the time and effort invested in initial training is extremely worthwhile.

Here are the next steps to consider:

1. **Review this Guide Dog Information Pack:** make sure you read through the information thoroughly.
2. **Prepare emotionally and physically:** training can be intense, so it's important to be in the right mindset and health condition.
3. **Reach out with questions:** if you have any questions after reading this information, please contact us on 1800 436 364.
4. **Complete the Guide Dog Self-Assessment checklist at the end of this document:** this will help you decide if Guide Dog Mobility is right for you.
5. **Apply:** if you feel ready, call us on **1800 436 364** to submit your application for an assessment.





Guide Dog self-assessment.

Is a Guide Dog the right mobility aid for you?

The following questions are designed to help you assess your interest in and preparedness for Guide Dog mobility. If you answer “no” to any question, it does not necessarily mean that a Guide Dog will not be a suitable mobility aid for you.



Do you have a change of vision that significantly affects your daily mobility and causes you to rely on a primary mobility aid, such as a long cane, for most of your independent travel? If you have a degree of functional vision, can you trust a dog to choose a path without overriding its guiding role?

Yes No

Do you walk by yourself at least three times a week for approximately 30 minutes each time?

Yes No

Training with a Guide Dog and maintaining the dog’s skills can be physically challenging. Can you currently walk for 45 minutes or more without resting? If not, are you willing to increase your ability to walk for this duration?

Yes No

Are you confident in your orientation and mobility skills? For example, can you problem-solve if you become disorientated, identify landmarks and cues along a travel route, and use traffic sounds to determine when it is safe to cross a road?

Yes No

A Guide Dog is trained to avoid obstacles rather than locate them. Are you willing to travel with less physical contact with your environment?

Yes No

A Guide Dog will be with you for most of the day, seven days a week. A significant part of having a Guide Dog is enjoying its companionship and daily presence. Do you like the idea of having a dog around even when it’s not guiding you?

Yes No



Having a Labrador in your home means there will be dog hair due to molting. There may also be occasional toileting accidents, attempts to steal food, inappropriate barking and over-excitement. Are you and those living with you comfortable having a dog indoors and managing these challenges?

Yes No

Caring for a Guide Dog includes daily grooming and health checks, and ensuring its basic needs are met, such as providing water, daily feeding, providing genuine affection, and regular opportunities to toilet and play. On average, this requires an additional two hours a day and sometimes more if the dog gets sick. Are you prepared to make time in your daily schedule to care for a Guide Dog?

Yes No

You will be responsible for the costs associated with having a Guide Dog. This includes purchasing quality dog food, paying veterinary bills, providing toys and treats, covering unforeseen expenses, and paying for pet insurance if you choose to have this coverage. (You may be eligible for NDIS funding that covers some of these costs.) Are you able to financially support a Guide Dog?

Yes No

Have you considered where you'll source dog food, whether there is an appropriate toileting area for a Guide Dog at your home and near your regular destinations, the location of an enclosed area where your dog can run and how you can access it (this can be your own yard), and the location of a vet you can take your dog to?

Yes No

Is there someone you can rely on to look after your dog in case of an emergency or times when you cannot care for it, such as if you become very ill?

Yes No

Working with a Guide Dog often attracts attention from the general public, leading to increased person-to-person contact. Are you prepared for this increased interaction? Do you feel prepared to self-advocate if challenged on your access rights at a location like a café?

Yes No

The initial training program takes around four weeks and lays the foundation for long-term successful mobility with a Guide Dog. Can you commit to four weeks of initial training?

Yes No

We're here whenever you need us.



1800 436 364



nsw.guidedogs.com.au

**Guide
Dogs.**