

Guide Dogs.

Applying for a Guide Dog

If you have a significant vision loss which affects your safe mobility and you enjoy walking then a Guide Dog may assist you to enjoy your life more.

If you had pet dogs in the past or have one at present then a Guide Dog may add greatly to your lifestyle. If you have never had a dog before this is no barrier to applying for a Guide Dog.

It is not the case that you must be totally blind to train with one of our Guide Dogs, nor is there an upper age limit for anyone applying for a Guide Dog.

It costs at least \$50,000 to breed, raise and train a Guide Dog in Australia. Guide Dogs are provided to clients on a fee for service basis. All NDIS eligible clients will be required to have Guide Dog funding in place before being matched with a Guide Dog. Where there is no funding, the organisation will also provide Guide Dogs at no charge to applicants who complete the application process successfully.

Even though Guide Dogs are working dogs it is important for a person and their Guide Dog to enjoy relaxing and playing together and also have time to “just be a dog”.

If you are not sure about whether a Guide Dog is right for you at this time, our application process is designed to equip you to make an informed decision. We are certain that after completing your application (which is obligation free) that whatever your decision you will be glad you applied.

Your application for a Guide Dog will normally progress through the following stages:

1. A self-screening over the phone with a Guide Dog Services team member to assess whether you meet the criteria set by the International Guide Dog Federation. For the purpose of safeguarding our clients, staff and dogs all criminal history must also be declared.
2. As part of the standard screening process, Guide Dogs Queensland will conduct a public domain internet search on all program applicants. Guide Dogs Queensland will not request access to non-public social media. No information gathered during this search of publicly available data will be shared with any other organisation or provider.
3. If progressing, a medical history from your doctor and eye specialist will be required.
4. An interview and assessment of your independent orientation and mobility skills and travel routes, with a Guide Dogs Mobility Specialist, usually at your home (allow 3 -4 hours).
5. An assessment of your potential to successfully work with a Guide Dog by attending a Residential Extended assessment class at Bald Hills (2.5 days).
6. Only at the completion of this assessment process will you be considered for the Guide Dog Waiting list.

Stage 1

Self-Screening

Below you'll find a series of questions relating to the criteria set by the International Guide Dog Federation that you can use to help you make your decision.

- Do you have a significant or profound vision loss which makes it difficult travelling safely and independently because of your vision loss?
- Do you have the level of vision loss that causes dependence on a primary mobility aid at all times? Eg long cane or Guide Dog. Most clients who apply for a Guide Dog are legally blind.
- Are you confident in your orientation and mobility skills (e.g. are you able to maintain a fairly straight line while walking, keep track of where you are on your route, use traffic sounds to determine when to cross a street)? Are you comfortable generalising these skills to environments other than your home area?
- A Guide Dog needs regular work and destinations for it to maintain safe guiding skills. Are you currently travelling regularly on different and purposeful travel routes each week? Eg work, study, errands etc If not, are you willing to develop the stamina and ability to begin regular travel?
- Are you willing to travel while experiencing less tactile contact with your environment than a long cane would give you? This occurs because Guide Dogs are trained to guide people through the environment to avoid obstacles rather than contact them (as a long cane does).
- Guide Dogs are working dogs first and foremost. Living and working with a guide dog involves teamwork and leadership. Would you accept the responsibility to be a consistent and fair leader in such a partnership?
- Can you provide financially for the physical and emotional needs of this working companion? A Guide Dog will need quality food, veterinarian visits, and pet health insurance is recommended. (We estimate it costs a minimum of \$1000 and can go up to several thousand dollars per year to care for a Guide Dog). A Guide Dog will also need several opportunities each day to relieve, grooming, playtime and affection from its partner.
- Are you and those who live with you comfortable with having a dog inside the home and are they willing to comply with some basic guidelines GDQ provides regarding the care, control and behaviour of your dog? If you work or study, does your employer or educational institution have any objections to you having a Guide Dog with you?
- Partnering with a Guide Dog frequently attracts the admiration and interest of people around you. Would you be comfortable with having more contact with the public?
- A Guide Dog is with you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (exceptions apply). A portion of having a Guide Dog is also simply enjoying him or her as a companion. Do you like the idea of having a dog with you at all times regardless of whether they are on or off duty?

For the purpose of safeguarding our clients, staff and dogs we need to ask the following:-

- Have you ever had an alcohol or substance abuse problem? Yes or No

If yes a clearance from your doctor may be required.

- Have you ever been convicted of a crime or banned from keeping animals? Yes or no

If yes a member of our team will be in contact to discuss this with you. A criminal history check may be required. Guide Dogs Queensland will consider applications from individuals with criminal convictions on a case-by-case basis.

Stages 4 and 5

Guide Dog Client Assessment Criteria

The following assessment criteria is used by Guide Dog Mobility Specialists to determine an applicant's suitability for a Guide Dog. This criteria also contains all the assessment criteria recommended by the International Guide Dog Federation in the IGDF standards for all members.

1. The ability to achieve and maintain the leadership role in the person/guide dog relationship.
2. The physical ability and the appropriate ongoing health status to manage a guide dog.
3. The functional orientation to the routes and destinations that the person intends to use with a guide dog.
4. Sufficient work for the guide dog to maintain its safe guiding skills.
5. Has the level of vision loss that causes dependence on a primary mobility aid.
6. Has the capacity to demonstrate independent and safe road crossings (including the use of appropriate assistance).
7. Has a safe and supportive home environment.
8. Access to the required resources (including financial and emotional resources) to maintain the guide dog's ongoing health and temperamental wellbeing.
9. The ability to understand, retain and implement instructions related to the establishment and consistent maintenance of safe and independent guide dog mobility.
10. The willingness to comply (by signed acknowledgement) with Guide Dog Queensland's policies on Animal Welfare and The Guide Dog Users' Agreement (copies of the Agreement are available upon request).
11. The willingness to provide (by signed acknowledgement) full and complete medical information, (this may include diabetic, renal, audiogram, neurological reports etc) necessary for the provision of a successful guide dog mobility training program.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does a Guide Dog do?

A Guide Dog is trained to guide a client in a given direction unless told otherwise, avoiding obstacles and ignoring distractions along the route. It will stop at kerbs and steps, find doors, crossings and places which are visited regularly, and it will guide you across the road but it is up to you to decide where and when to cross safely.

The Guide Dog and client are a partnership, with the client giving commands and encouragement and telling the Guide Dog which way to go. The Guide Dog is not infallible, but for some people it can offer a unique, safe and effective way of getting about independently.

How does the Guide Dog know where it is going?

The dog will learn your travel routes gradually. However it is a partnership and you need to have knowledge of your environment to support and direct your dog as it guides you through the environment.

How do the Guide Dogs know when it is safe to cross the road?

The short answer is that they don't. The decision to cross the road is made by the person working the Guide Dog who decides where and when it is safe to cross.

How often should I go out with the Guide Dog?

Like all young dogs, Guide Dogs need regular exercise. It is important that they are exercised whilst working in harness to reinforce and maintain their training. A broad guide for the amount of work the Guide Dog would require would be approximately 2-3 kilometres a day for 4-5 days a week with a variety of travel routes. Many Guide Dog teams work further and more often than this.

Can anyone be trained with a Guide Dog?

If you have a significant vision impairment that makes safe independent travel difficult, you are over 18 years of age and resident in Queensland you can apply for a Guide Dog. Not everyone is suited to working with a Guide Dog and there are many factors that have to be taken into account.

I still have some remaining vision. Can a Guide Dog help me?

If you are dependent on a primary mobility aid such as a Long Cane to move around safely you may apply for a Guide Dog. Some remaining vision can be useful for recognising where you are on a route and can be used to assist the Guide Dog. Most clients that apply for a Guide Dog are legally blind.

What types of dogs are used?

We mainly use Labradors, Golden Retrievers and crosses of these two breeds.

What if I have other health problems or physical disabilities?

Many people with additional conditions have succeeded in training with a Guide Dog, including those with diabetes, hearing loss and amputees.

Am I too old?

There is no upper age limit to work a Guide Dog and we have trained people in their seventies, eighties and even nineties. The main consideration is whether you are able to look after and work a young dog.

Can you train me if my first language is not English?

We welcome enquiries from anyone who may benefit from working a Guide Dog and we can provide an interpreter to assist during training.

I have a pet dog – can I keep it and still have a Guide Dog?

Usually the answer is yes and once introduced the two dogs will generally be fine together. You would also need to consider how you will exercise the two dogs since you cannot work the Guide Dog in harness and lead the pet dog at the same time.

What about other pets?

Again, this is not usually a problem. Guide Dogs are generally quite happy around other pets, including cats. If they are introduced carefully then they get to know each other and the Guide Dog will settle in to the home.

How long would I have to wait before I could be trained?

The waiting time can vary depending on the length of the waiting list. This is governed by the types of Guide Dogs available at any given time and in some cases the waiting period can be as long as two years. The length of waiting time is dependent upon identifying a Guide Dog that will suit your needs, abilities and lifestyle.

How do I care for a Guide Dog?

The Guide Dog becomes your responsibility once you have completed training. As with any animal, a Guide Dog also requires day to day care, including grooming, feeding the correct diet, toileting and exercising as well as regular visits to the vet. Our training program will include advice and the practical experience of caring for your Guide Dog. A Guide Dog also needs to be worked regularly.

How much does a Guide Dog cost?

Guide Dogs are provided to clients on a fee for service basis. All NDIS eligible clients will be required to have guide funding in place before being matched with a Guide Dog. Where there is no funding, the organisation will also provide Guide Dogs at no charge to applicants who complete the application process successfully. Applicants are expected to take responsibility for the care and financial maintenance of their Guide Dog. The minimum cost for caring for a Guide Dog is at least \$20 per week but can be much more.

If I am eligible for the NDIS how much will I be charged?

If eligible for NDIS the approximate charges for the application and training process are listed below:-

Stage	Charges involved	Fees
Home interview and assessment	Up to 4 hours plus possibly 5 hours report writing if progressing to the wait list straight away	Up to \$1845
Residential Extended Assessment on site in Bald Hills	2.5 days group training, 2 nights accommodation, food, report writing	Approx \$4500 Clients are responsible for organising their own travel to and from Bald Hills
Guide Dog placement training and first year follow ups	Up to 80 hours individual training, residential class including 4 nights accommodation and food, 3 x 2 hour follow ups and upto 20 hours aftercare if required	Approx. \$75,000 including training and cost of Guide Dog
Ongoing assessments 2 nd year onwards	Up to 25 hours GDML and travel	Up to \$5000 per annum

Do I need any training to use the Guide Dog?

Yes - training is as important for you as it is for the Guide Dog, and even experienced Guide Dog Clients need to re-train when they are allocated new dogs. Training usually lasts from three to five weeks depending on each person's situation and their experience.

During training you would learn how to handle your Guide Dog in the various situations you would encounter when working together. Much of the training takes place outdoors and you would be required to undertake two or three walks a day in different environments.

Learning how to care for the Guide Dog and how to manage it when not working, for example at home, in cafes and restaurants etc, are important aspects of training too. Most clients would agree that although training with a Guide Dog is challenging the rewards and benefits of Guide Dog mobility are considerable.

Can I take the Guide Dog to work?

In most cases employers are happy for the Guide Dog to go into the workplace, and you would probably be using the Guide Dog in order to travel to work. You would need to ensure that there is somewhere suitable for the Guide Dog in the workplace, for example under the desk, and also that you make provision for the Guide Dog to access fresh water and to relieve itself during the day.

GDQ staff are happy to discuss this in more detail with you and your employer if we can assist. Anti-discrimination legislation requires that people with Guide Dogs have access to their workplaces.

Is the Guide Dog allowed into public places and on public transport?

The Guide, Hearing & Assistance Dogs Act 2009 and Anti-Discrimination Act in Queensland mean that Guide Dogs are accepted in most public places including shops, hotels and restaurants as well as on public transport.

Does the Guide Dog have to go everywhere with me?

Sometimes it may be more convenient to leave the Guide Dog at home, or it may be that you are going somewhere very noisy or busy and where you do not need the Guide Dog to work. For this reason it is a good idea to get into the habit of leaving the Guide Dog at home occasionally for two to three hours sometimes.

How should the Guide Dog behave in the house?

We believe that your Guide Dog should be a pleasure for you to live with. This will happen if the Guide Dog is quiet, clean and well behaved while living with you in your home. During the training period you will be taught how to ensure your Guide Dog behaves well not only at home but out in public too.

What is the family's relationship with the Guide Dog?

Although there are always adjustments to change, the Guide Dog should fit into family life with little disruption. It is important you should be the "leader of the dog" and this role is strengthened by you feeding, working and reinforcing appropriate behaviour in the Guide Dog. In your temporary absence from home it is helpful if a family member is able to maintain the same consistent approach with your Guide Dog.

Will a Guide Dog fit in with children?

Guide Dogs are used to interacting with children, so there is little difficulty with them fitting into family life. To assist with the introduction it is important that children do not overwhelm the dog, rush at it, or corner it. They may need a little time to get to know each other, but if the dog is under control and allowed to approach children quietly there will be no problem. The Guide Dog's bed should be its sanctuary and children should be encouraged to leave the dog in peace when it goes there.

Would my Guide Dog be allowed to play, have a free-run and have 'time out'?

Yes, just like other dogs we believe Guide Dogs need the opportunity to let off steam and have a good run and play, especially with the person who works with them. However the majority of their exercise will be when they are working. They are trained to return when called or when a whistle is used, but like all dogs, they can sometimes be slow to return if they find something interesting.

What happens after training?

You will receive regular visits from an instructor and Guide Dogs Queensland will be there to support you and your Guide Dog throughout your working partnership.

Can I give the dog titbits to eat?

Occasionally a titbit or treat can be given as a reward for good work or behaviour but we try to discourage Guide Dogs from sniffing and scavenging so they concentrate while working. Giving titbits randomly and too often can affect their working concentration.

What if I want to go away or on holidays?

Guide Dog Clients often have a responsible family member or friend they would trust to look after the dog. If this is not the case, Guide Dogs Queensland may be able to assist you with its network of volunteer boarders who look after the dogs. These boarders have received training and understand the importance of being consistent and reinforcing good working practices even when the dog isn't working.

Can I take the Guide Dog overseas on holidays?

Legally yes, but there are issues which would need to be covered depending on the country to be visited and length of stay etc. The Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (A.Q.I.S.) provides information on travelling abroad and returning to Australia with animals. Sometimes it may be more convenient to allow your Guide Dog to be boarded at home while you are overseas.

How long does it take to get used to working the Guide Dog?

Although you will usually be working your Guide Dog independently soon after returning home it generally takes six months to a year for you and your new Guide Dog to work together smoothly and consistently.

What if a problem arises?

If a problem arises with the Guide Dog you can contact our Guide Dog Services coordinator who will organise for a GDMI to call or visit you if required.

How long does the Guide Dog work for - and what happens at the end of its working life?

Guide Dogs are usually between eighteen months and two years old when they begin to work and this work will continue for approximately seven to eight years. At the end of its working life you may decide to keep the dog, or may know of a friend or family member who would care for the dog. Guide Dogs Queensland provide a service which selects suitable homes for retired Guide Dogs when people are not able to keep them after they are retired.

What if a Guide Dog is not for me? Are there any other options?

Many vision-impaired people travel safely and independently using other forms of mobility. If during your application you decide that a Guide Dog is not the right mobility aid for you, we will discuss other services we can offer for your consideration.

For further information please contact Guide Dogs Queensland on:

Phone: (07) 3500 9050

Email: gdsadmin@guidedogsqld.com.au