

Clinician Information Sheet

Thank you for reviewing the attached documentation.

Your patient has expressed interest in pursuing either an Assistance Dog or an In-Home Support Dog pathway. The accompanying forms request your professional opinion regarding disability confirmation suitability for this process.

This information sheet is provided to support a safe, informed, and clinically appropriate decision.

OVERVIEW OF PATHWAYS

Assistance Dog (Public Access Role)

An Assistance Dog is trained to perform specific tasks that mitigate the effects of a person's disability. This may include task interruption, grounding behaviours, mobility assistance, alert behaviours, or other individualised supports.

This pathway involves:

- Multi-stage structured training over an extended period
- Public access expectations
- Ongoing behavioural reliability standards
- Exposure to high-stimulation environments
- Long-term responsibility for maintaining training

In-Home Support Dog

An In-Home Support Dog may also be trained in specific supportive tasks and behaviours but is not expected to meet public access standards.

These dogs may assist with:

- Emotional regulation
- Routine support
- Functional participation
- Confidence-building in pet-friendly environments

This pathway is generally less intensive in terms of environmental exposure and public behavioural expectations but still requires consistent training and structured care.

CLIENT COMMITMENTS

Care & Wellbeing Responsibility

Beyond training, dog ownership includes:

- Daily exercise and enrichment
- Veterinary care (including annual working clearance where relevant)
- Financial responsibility for food, equipment, insurance, and emergency care
- Management during illness, behavioural changes, or life transitions

The presence of a dog may increase rather than reduce stress if routines become inconsistent or capacity decreases.

Financial Considerations

Financial commitment includes:

- Initial training fees
- Ongoing training sessions
- Equipment
- Veterinary costs
- Insurance
- Emergency care
- Long-term ownership expenses

It may be useful to consider whether financial strain could negatively impact wellbeing.

Psychological & Social Considerations

Working or visibly supported dogs often increase social visibility. This may result in:

- Questions from members of the public
- Increased social interaction
- Attention in community settings

While this can be empowering for some individuals, it may be overwhelming or destabilising for others.

It may also be helpful to consider:

- The individual's tolerance for public scrutiny
- Their ability to advocate for themselves
- Their capacity to manage conflict or misunderstanding

Capacity for Reflection & Adjustment

Because training involves trial and error, it is important to consider whether the individual can:

- Reflect on their own emotional responses
- Recognise when they need support
- Seek guidance appropriately
- Tolerate setbacks without significant destabilisation

In some cases, a dog can be highly supportive. In others, it may amplify stress or responsibility.

CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When completing the attached forms, you may wish to consider:

- Whether the presence of a dog is likely to enhance functional independence
- Whether the responsibility aligns with current mental and physical health stability
- Whether this pathway supports long-term wellbeing
- Whether current supports are sufficient to sustain this commitment
- Whether there are foreseeable risks that may outweigh benefit

Your professional discretion is central to this process.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT & SAFEGUARDS

Clients are not navigating this process independently.

Assistive K9s provides:

- Structured staged training
- Ongoing assessment of dog suitability

- Guidance for handler skill development
- Review checkpoints
- Clear progression criteria
- Redirection where appropriate

Completion of these forms does not automatically guarantee program acceptance. All candidate's dogs undergo behavioural assessment and ongoing review of both dog and client to ensure suitability remains appropriate.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If you have concerns, reservations, or feel that this pathway may not be appropriate at this time, we encourage you to indicate this clearly.

A conservative decision is always preferable to long-term misalignment.

If further clarification is required, you are welcome to contact Assistive K9s directly. Or check out our online resource which expands on these points in further detail: <https://in-home-support-vs-assistance-dog.netlify.app>

