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Guide Dogs Fact Sheet

Guide dogs and their handlers are allowed access to any premises to which the public would normally have access. It's the law.

Guide dog legislation across Canada

In all of Canada's 10 provinces and three territories, legislation prohibits discriminating against a person with a disability who is working with a guide dog. Discrimination includes denial of access to any premises to which the public would normally have access.

Despite it being illegal to deny access or refuse service, it happens every day – especially in taxis, restaurants, hotels and stores. The CNIB Foundation is asking businesses to open their doors to Canadians with guide dogs. Not only is it the right thing to do, it's the law.

Legislation varies from province to province, however in all provinces it contravenes the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms to deny a blind person accompanied by a guide dog access to a federally owned or regulated place or service.

For more information about specific legislation that protects guide dog teams in your province, please visit cnibguidedogs.ca.

Know your rights and legal responsibilities regarding guide dog access

Business owners have a responsibility to ensure the rights of guide dog teams are respected – meaning business owners cannot deny access or refuse service to guide dog teams.

If a guide dog's behaviour is inappropriate, the business or organization has the right to ask the guide dog handler to leave. Inappropriate behaviour generally means the guide dog is not under the handler's control (such as barking after being told not to, or jumping up).

It is unacceptable to ask for proof that a dog is a guide dog, unless it is behaving inappropriately. It is best practice to assume the guide dog is a qualified guide dog, unless given reason to think otherwise. When competing rights are an issue – such as allergies – a compromise needs to be made to maintain the rights of everyone involved.

Guide dog etiquette


If you encounter someone and their guide dog, please follow proper guide dog etiquette to ensure the safety of the guide dog team:

- Avoid talking to or interacting with the guide dog.
- Do not pet, feed or distract the guide dog, as it can potentially affect its training. When the guide dog is not in harness, you may ask the handler if it's okay to pet the dog.

If you own a pet dog, please keep it on a leash and under control in the community. When approaching a guide dog team with your dog, clearly notify the handler and say, "I'm passing on your left and I have a dog with me."

What do guide dogs do

Whether it's avoiding obstacles, stopping at curbs and steps or negotiating traffic, guide dogs foster independence for their handlers. Guide dogs are among the most highly trained dogs in the world, performing tasks that require intensive standardized training, and are specifically trained to assist someone who is blind or partially sighted with mobility. In fact, guide dogs are the only service dogs trained to disobey their handler's command if it will put their handler at risk. The safety of their handler is the guide dog's number-one priority.



The guide dog's harness and U-shaped handle facilitate communication between the dog and their handler. In this partnership, the person provides directional commands and the dog ensures the team's safety.

Guide dogs are not pets. They do serious work.

Service, therapy and emotional support animals

There is still much confusion surrounding the differences between guide dogs, service dogs, therapy dogs and emotional support animals – particularly about the rights and legislation that protect them.

Service dogs are specifically trained to assist a person with a disability and perform specific tasks that mitigate the disability. Both guide dogs and service dogs are protected under human rights legislation across Canada.

Therapy dogs receive some training to provide psychological or physiological comfort to people in different situations. Emotional support animals receive no specific training and are companion animals that provide comfort to people.

Therapy dogs and emotional support animals do not have access rights and require permission to enter restaurants, hotels, taxis and other businesses.