

ADI Global Assistance Dog Policy Statement

Defining an Assistance Dog

As the leading global authority on assistance dog standards and accreditation, **Assistance Dogs International (ADI) defines an assistance dog as a guide, hearing, or service dog specifically trained to do three or more tasks to mitigate the effects of an individual's disability.** These dogs are highly skilled and trained to meet internationally recognized standards to ensure they can safely and effectively assist their handlers and enhance their independence, mobility and quality of life.

Currently, there is no globally legislated legal definition of an assistance dog, leading to variations in terminology and understanding across regions. Terms such as "service dog," "support dog," and "therapy dog" are sometimes used interchangeably, causing confusion and inconsistent standards.

To address this, ADI is committed to establishing a globally recognized definition and advocating for adoption in legislation worldwide. **This initiative ensures that all assistance dogs, whether from an organisation or owner-trained, meet high training and welfare standards and that the rights of individuals with a disability are protected, respected and upheld globally.**

ADI believes this definition is compatible with the CEN EN 17984-1:2024 definition and that this forms a strong basis for collaborative work to recognise and support an effective legal framework to meet the needs of assistance dog users.

Training Standards and Accreditation

Assistance dogs should be trained to the highest possible standards, whether this is by accredited organizations, private trainers, or owner-trainers, to ensure they are reliable, well-behaved in public, and capable of performing tasks that mitigate their handler's disability. These standards are upheld by leading international accrediting bodies, such as ADI and the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF).

Accreditation provides clear benefits:

- Ensures that assistance dogs meet consistent behavioural, health, and welfare standards.
- Accreditation significantly enhances public access to services and public domains (for individuals with a disability) by ensuring standardised quality and so reducing the frequency of access refusals.
- Safeguards public confidence in the legitimacy and capabilities of assistance dogs.

Verification and Public Access

In many regions, assistance dogs have **legal rights to access public spaces** where pet dogs are not allowed. However, inconsistent laws and lack of awareness among businesses and service providers lead to frequent access refusals.

To address this, ADI has introduced a digital ID system to help distinguish genuine assistance dogs from pets or inadequately trained dogs. ADI supports the implementation of clear verification mechanisms, including:

- **Standardised Identification:** ADI encourages the use of uniform IDs, harnesses, or other markers to indicate a dog's trained status.
- **Certification Systems:** ADI member organisations provide verification that an assistance dog has been trained to meet ADI standards.

These measures streamline public access and prevent fraudulent misrepresentation while maintaining the dignity and rights of individuals who rely on assistance dogs.

The Importance of Taking This Seriously

The misrepresentation of untrained pets as assistance dogs is a growing problem that has serious consequences:

- **Compromises public safety:** Poorly trained dogs in public spaces can cause disruptions, fear, or even harm to legitimate assistance dogs.
- **Erosion of trust:** Negative experiences with untrained dogs lead businesses to deny access to properly trained assistance dog teams.
- **Jeopardizes animal welfare:** Assistance dogs undergo extensive training to handle complex environments. Placing untrained dogs in demanding situations can cause undue stress and compromise their well-being.

Call to Action

To uphold the integrity of assistance dog services and protect the rights of those who rely on them, ADI calls upon governments, industry stakeholders, and the public to:

1. **Strengthen legal frameworks:** Develop and enforce laws that clearly define assistance dogs and penalize misrepresentation.
2. **Recognise and support standardised training and accreditation models:** Ensure all assistance dogs meet high standards, regardless of who trained them.
3. **Improve public awareness and education:** Reduce discrimination against legitimate assistance dog users and enhance access rights enforcement.

By working together on a global scale, we can create an inclusive and supportive environment where assistance dogs and their handlers are recognized, respected, and empowered to participate fully and without barriers.