

ADUK QUICK GUIDE



Assistance Dogs in GP surgeries – information for Practice Managers

www.assistancedogs.org.uk | Registered Charity 1119538

About this Guide

This guide is for Practice Managers in GP surgeries and offers practical, straightforward guidance on welcoming highly trained assistance dog partnerships. It can be used alongside other ADUK Quick Guides, all available online. If you're looking for information about employing a staff member who relies on a highly trained assistance dog, please see our ADUK Quick Guide, 'Welcoming Employees with Assistance Dogs in the Workplace.'

If you already have an Assistance Dog Policy in place, ADUK can review it and check for accuracy. We also offer staff training to help ensure your practice is confident, compliant, and consistently welcoming to disabled people who work with assistance dogs.

Please note that while ADUK can provide information, we cannot and do not offer legal advice.

Assistance Dogs UK

Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK) is a coalition of assistance dog charities that have been accredited by one of the two leading global bodies in the field: either Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF).

As a charity, our aim is to ensure that assistance dog handlers can live, work, and travel with confidence. We do this by promoting high standards across the sector, raising public awareness, and supporting organisations to meet their legal responsibilities.

We offer policy reviews, staff training, and information to help service providers become more accessible and inclusive. Whether you're looking to welcome assistance dog handlers into your workplace, business, or service, ADUK is here to help you get it right.

Assistance dogs are specially trained to carry out practical tasks and/or alerts that support a disabled person or someone with a long-term medical condition. These dogs play a vital role in supporting a disabled persons independence and improving quality of life.



With thousands of people who rely on highly trained assistance dogs in the UK, any one of them could be a current or future service user at your practice. Understanding your legal responsibilities and applying them in day-to-day interactions helps ensure your practice is not only compliant but welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to all.

The Law

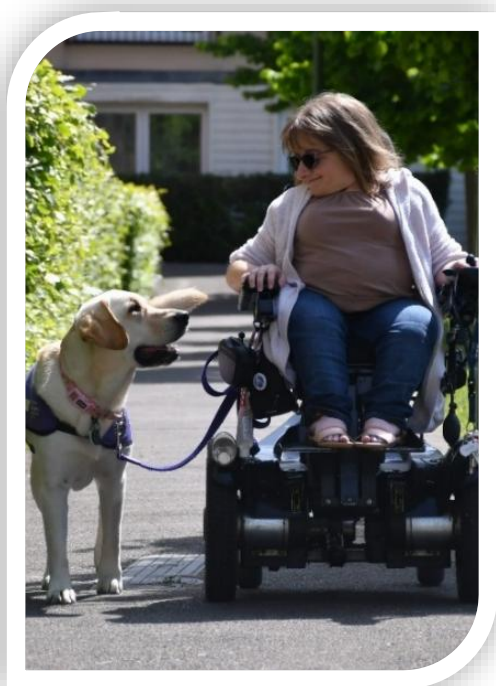
In the UK, disabled people are protected by the Equality Act (2010), and in Northern Ireland by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). It is important to remember that not every person with an assistance dog has a visible disability and not all assistance dogs look the same.

It is unlawful for service providers, including GP practices, to treat disabled people less favourably by refusing services or providing a lower standard of service because a person is accompanied by an assistance dog.

Access Rights

Under the Equality Act (2010), disabled people have the right to equal access to medical care and services. Disability is a protected characteristic and, in law, an assistance dog is recognised as a mobility or auxiliary aid, comparable to a wheelchair or white cane - not as a pet. In most healthcare settings, including GP surgeries, health clinics and mental health suites, assistance dogs should be welcomed. While there are a few exceptions, for example sterile environments such as surgical theatres, this does not apply to standard clinical areas. If a specific space, such as an X-ray, is not appropriate for an assistance dog, the practice must offer reasonable adjustments to ensure the handler can still access care.

Practices are responsible for maintaining appropriate cleaning protocols, as they would for any patient. Highly trained assistance dogs will be clean, well-groomed and toilet trained, and are highly unlikely to pose a hygiene risk. It is your practice's duty to make sure disabled people who rely on highly trained assistance dogs can access the care they need - without unnecessary barriers.



Staff and Patient Allergies and Concerns

Concerns about allergies are sometimes raised as a reason to restrict access for assistance dogs in GP surgeries. However, allergy is unlikely to be considered a justifiable reason to refuse access under the Equality Act.

If a specific risk is identified, reasonable steps should be taken to reduce that risk, such as using separate consultation rooms or adjusting appointment times. Disabled people must not bear the cost of any additional cleaning, staffing, or adjustments needed to manage this.

Similarly, fear of dogs among staff or other patients may not be considered a valid reason to refuse access. It is the responsibility of the practice to manage these situations appropriately.

Care must not be refused to a disabled person who relies on a trained assistance dog. They must not be treated less favourably than other patients under any circumstances.

Identifying an Assistance Dog

Assistance dogs are dogs that have been highly trained to carry out a range of tasks and alerts that support a disabled person or person with a long-term medical condition. It's important to understand that ADUK member organisations are not the only source of assistance dogs in the UK. Some disabled people train their own dogs, some dogs are trained by independent trainers and others are trained by non-ADUK organisations. Access must not be refused simply because an assistance dog was not trained by an ADUK member organisation or does not carry ADUK ID.

There is no official register of assistance dogs in the UK, and no certification process, so there is no legal 'proof' you can ask for.

Assistance dogs trained by ADUK member organisations will usually wear clear identifiers, such as branded jackets or harnesses, ID tags, and lead slips. Handlers may also carry a yellow ADUK Identification Booklet – but neither ID nor livery is required by UK law.

There is no legal definition concerning the standards/types of training an assistance dog must have, although there are expectations about behaviour which we cover in more detail below. Some handlers may provide certificates



from professional trainers or classes, but legal access rights do not depend on formal paperwork

ADUK recommends treating each person individually. If someone states that they are disabled and that their dog is a highly trained assistance dog, and the dog is under control and well-behaved, it may be unlawful to deny them access.

Emotional support dogs and dogs in training

Emotional support dogs/animals and assistance dogs in training are not currently referenced in UK access laws; therefore it is ADUK's understanding that GP surgeries are not legally required to permit access to dogs/animals in these categories in the same way they are for a disabled person with a highly trained assistance dog.



Expectations

Assistance dogs are highly trained to remain calm, focused, and well-behaved in public. However, no dog is perfect 100% of the time and they may very occasionally be distracted. However, there are certain behaviours or signs that would typically fall outside the expectations for a trained assistance dog such as:

- Persistent lunging, barking, or jumping up (note: some assistance dogs may display these briefly as part of a trained alert)
- Aggressive or extremely fearful behaviour, such as growling or cowering
- Signs of poor care or poor hygiene
- Lack of toilet training

If a dog is displaying these behaviours, it may be appropriate to raise a concern in a respectful and proportionate way and, if a dog is consistently displaying these behaviours, it may be reasonable to revoke or refuse access to meet the practice's duty of care to other patients. However, a

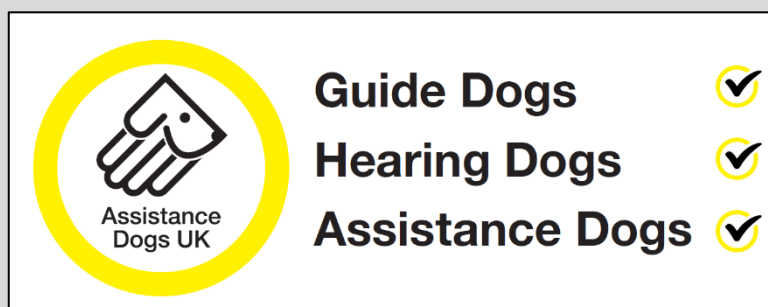
blanket ban on all assistance dogs based on concerns over how dogs may behave in the practice should not be used as a reason to deny access.

While practices may enquire whether an assistance dog is up to date with vaccinations or covered by public liability insurance, there is no legal requirement for either of these two things and no legal requirement for handlers to provide documentation if they have it. Access must not be made conditional on providing this kind of proof.

Posters and window stickers

Posters like the one shown here can help staff and visitors recognise some of the assistance dogs trained by ADUK member organisations. You can download and print this poster for free from the ADUK Quick Guides and Resources section on our website. ADUK can also supply a simple window sticker which highlights your practice welcomes assistance dogs.

Please note this poster simply provides a snapshot of current ADUK member-trained assistance dogs. It does not represent all assistance dogs in the UK and should not be used in anyway when determining access.



Additional Sources of Information

For more information on how to welcome disabled people who rely on assistance dogs, visit the Quick Guides and Resources section at www.aduk.org.uk or visit [The Equality and Human Rights Commission's Assistance dogs: A guide for businesses and service providers](#)

Other ADUK Quick Guides and Resources.

- Welcoming Customers with Assistance Dogs
- Welcoming Guests with Assistance Dogs in Holiday Accommodation
- Welcoming Employees with Assistance Dogs in the Workplace
- Welcoming Tenants with Assistance Dogs in Rented Accommodation
- Welcoming Assistance Dogs in Schools
- Welcoming Students with Assistance Dogs in Further & Higher Education
- Welcoming Assistance Dogs on Beaches all year round
- Writing an Assistance Dog Policy to welcome assistance dog users to your organisation
- ADUK Member Trained Dogs Poster
- 'What is an Assistance Dog' Animation
- 'Service Providers & Employers Guide to Assistance Dogs' Animation

Find out more about ADUK, and its members and watch our animation at www.assisteddogs.org.uk



Contact Assistance Dogs UK

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Write to us: Assistance Dogs (UK), c/o Hearing Dogs, The Grange, Wycombe Road, Saunderton, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, HP27 9NS.