

Title: Assistance Dogs Policy

Review Date: July 2025

Version: 1.3

Introduction

Policy statement

This policy predominantly supports those patients who may have the need for an assistance dog but also refers to therapy animals, pets and other animals that may visit the surgery sites. Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), assistance dogs, guide dogs, hearing dogs, medical alert dogs and their owners have the same rights to access this organisation as everyone else.

Guidance throughout this document has been sought from:

- [Assistance Dogs UK](#) (ADUK)
- RCN document titled [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](#)
- ADUK guide: [Assistance Dogs in GP surgeries – information for Practice Managers](#)

It is unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than other people, without justification, in areas such as service provision. Under the [DDA Section 21](#), service industries are legally obligated to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access to their services. The DDA only recognises very limited circumstances in which there may be “justification” for treating a disabled person less favourably than other people.

Guidance

Requirement

We are committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community. To that effect, assistance dogs are welcome.

Assistance dogs may also be in training and visits to public spaces will be part of their training. Therefore, dogs under training may also be permitted to attend along with their walker or sponsor. This “owner” may not be disabled.

Dogs that are not assistance dogs **are not** permitted entry to the practice.

Definition

An assistance dog is defined as a dog that has been specially trained to live with and accompany a disabled person carrying out such tasks as prompting them to take medication or assisting them to cross a road.

Legally, the Equality Act 2010 defines that an assistance dog is:

- a. A dog which has been trained to guide a blind person
- b. A dog which has been trained to assist a deaf person
- c. A dog which has been trained by a prescribed charity to assist a disabled person who has a disability that consists of epilepsy or otherwise affects the person's mobility, manual dexterity, physical co-ordination or ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects
- d. A dog of a prescribed category which has been trained to assist a disabled person who has a disability (other than one falling within paragraph (c)) of a prescribed kind

Assistance dogs are working dogs that have been rigorously trained by the following associations:

Canine Partners
Dog A.I.D

Medical Detection Dogs
Service Dogs UK

Dogs for Good	Support Dogs
Dogs for the Disabled	The Seeing Dogs Alliance
Guide Dogs for the Blind	Veterans with Dogs
Hearing Dogs for Deaf People	

Registered assistance dogs are working animals, not pets, and are relied on by their owners for independence. Each charity will have their own agreements outlining the expectations and responsibilities of the owner. They will also regularly monitor the owner and the dog to ensure their expectations are fulfilled. Information about these charities can be found at www.assistancedogs.org.uk.

Policy

Assistance dogs are able to enter most areas of this organisation whereas other types of animal are not.

A risk assessment has been conducted and it has been deemed that, for infection control purposes, the treatment room areas and consulting rooms (if minor surgery is to be carried out) are not permissible for any assistance dog to enter.

In these circumstances, the owner will be requested to ensure that alternative arrangements are made for the short period whilst they are receiving treatment. In these instances, the patient should be advised that it is our wish to minimise any separation time from their dog.

Owner's responsibilities

The owner has a responsibility to ensure that their assistance dog is well behaved and supervised throughout the visit. Additionally, they are to ensure that their dog:

- Is physically fit before visiting the practice. If pets become ill, diagnosis and treatment by a vet must be sought
- Is kept on a lead throughout the visit and is clearly identified as an assistance dog
- Is discouraged from jumping, scratching, and licking
- Does not come into contact with open wounds
- Is of an acceptable hygienic standard, i.e. not wet, muddy etc.
- Is exercised and has had its toileting and feeding requirements met
- Has claws trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches
- Is regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness
- Has received the relevant inoculations and is wormed on a regular basis
- Does not toilet within the grounds of the practice. Should there be an 'accident', then the patient is to clean up the mess. If this is not possible, then they are to inform a member of staff due to this presenting an infection control risk and also being unpleasant. It should be noted that cleaning costs may be borne by the owner of the animal
- The owner is legally responsible for their dog whilst on the premises. In the unlikely instance that a trained assistance dog injures a member of the public then recourse would need to be taken against the owner

Summary

While the Atrium Health Centre has a responsibility towards the person who requires an assistance dog, it has additional needs to ensure that both other patients and staff are also considered.

Therefore, a robust risk assessment has been raised that promotes compliance with DDA legislation whilst also complying with both IPC and HASAW requirements.