

# **NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde**

## **Assistance Dog Policy**

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## **Acknowledgements**

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde would like to thank a former patient for highlighting the need to develop clear guidelines relating to disabled people with Assistance Dogs using NHS services.

The Organisation has developed an Assistance Dog Policy for all staff working across Greater Glasgow and Clyde. It is anticipated that the information will assist staff in delivering services which are open and accessible to all disabled people using assistance dogs.

The Organisation would like to thank all who have contributed to the development of this Policy. A special thank you to Terry Thorpe from The Guide Dogs for the Blind, Deborah MacMillan, a guide dog user, Margaret Arthur, Alex McQuiggan, Bridget Elliott and Philip Biggs from Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and Ruth Hart from Deafblind Scotland for their assistance in developing the Assistance Dog Policy.

## **1. Policy Statement**

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) is committed to ensuring all equality issues are addressed under the Integrated Equality Scheme. NHSGGC promotes equality sensitive practice in all of its services, regardless of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age socioeconomic status and social class<sup>1</sup>.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) introduced measures aimed at eliminating the discrimination often faced by disabled people. In 2006 the Disability Equality Duty became law. This policy sets out requirements under Disability Legislation relating to access to services by disabled people who have specially trained dogs to assist with day to day activities<sup>4</sup>.

It also highlights the requirements for such dogs entering NHSGGC premises and offers examples of good practice. There are approximately 500 assistance dogs in the whole of Scotland. It is anticipated that this policy will minimise the restrictions of access to assistance dogs thus reducing distress to the person, assistance dog, staff and other patients.

**People who require access with Assistance Dogs are welcome within NHSGGC.**

**N.B. Throughout this policy, Person in Charge can include Managers, Senior Charge Nurses and Nursing Staff.**

**This policy applies to all NHS premises in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde including wards, outpatient departments, GP surgeries and dental surgeries.**

## **2. Introduction**

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1996 made it unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than other people, without justification, in areas such as service provision. The DDA recognises very limited circumstances in which there may be 'justification' for treating a disabled person less favourably than other people<sup>4</sup>.

One in five of the population of Scotland, nearly one million people, have rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)<sup>2</sup>. Disabled people have important rights under the DDA<sup>3</sup>. It is, therefore, a legal requirement to permit access to assistance dogs. Under the DDA Legislation section 21 organisations, NHSGGC services are legally obliged to make all reasonable adjustments for disabled people to enable them equal access to all<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.1 Scope

The Assistance Dog policy sets out the requirements of NHSGGC to support access for patients with assistance dogs. The policy applies to all employees of NHSGGC in all locations, patients, carers and visitors.

## 2.2 Risk

Organisational risk associated with assistance dogs can be broken into 3 principle areas with associated controls:

Risk	Control
Reduced patient access and non-compliance with legislation	Compliance with content of policy and reasonable adjustment
Infection control concerns and potential dog fouling	Compliance with existing infection control procedures including hand washing to support best practice
Inappropriate impact of dog presence or behaviour to others i.e. patient allergies <sup>11</sup> or dog bite	Safe and considered conduct by staff and dog owners as set out within policy

## 3. General Information: Assistance Dogs

An assistance dog is specially trained to assist a person with a specific impairment and has been qualified by one of the organisations registered as a member of Assistance Dogs (UK). These are:

- Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Dogs for the Disabled
- Canine Partners
- Support Dogs

**For more information on the roles of different assistant dogs please see appendix A.**

### 3.1 Recognising an Assistance Dog

- **Guide Dogs** assist people who are blind or who are visually impaired. They usually wear a white working harness with yellow reflectors and tags on their collar<sup>3</sup>.
- **A Guide Dog with a red and white harness** indicates the owner is deafblind<sup>12</sup>.
- **Hearing Dogs** assist people who are Deaf or who are hearing impaired. They wear a burgundy coloured coat with “hearing dog” written on the coat<sup>7</sup>.
- **Assistance Dogs, Support Dogs or Dogs for the Disabled** assist people with many different tasks ranging from alerting people when their owner has a seizure, carrying items, loading and unloading washing machines and many other tasks. They wear a purple coloured coat<sup>5</sup>.

## 4. NHS settings

### 4.1 Inpatient services

It is not customary for assistance dogs to be able to stay in hospital with their owners. The care of assistance dogs should be discussed with the patient where possible prior to hospital admission and alternative arrangements for care of the dog outwith the NHS setting should be considered.

In cases of unplanned care, where family or friends are unable to look after the dog, organisations such as The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association can make arrangements for the care of the dog during this time.

**Emergency contact numbers are available in appendix B.**

### 4.2 Outpatient Area or Primary Care

Assistance dogs can generally accompany the patient to outpatient or primary care visits. However, if the patient requires tests or treatment the patient may prefer that the dog be left in a suitable area for a short period. The assistance dogs can be kept in a quiet area, office or duty room while the patient is having any procedures or treatments.

If the patient is being transferred for a test, for example to X-Ray in a chair or trolley, the assistance dog can be led by its owner or a member of staff and should be able to accompany the patient.

### 4.3 Visitors with Assistance Dogs

The visitor with an assistance dog should be greeted on arrival to the clinical area and the Person in Charge will communicate any limitations to the visitor. (See Section 5.)

## 5. Access

It is the decision of the Person in Charge as to whether it is appropriate for the dog to be allowed into a particular clinical area.

The Person in Charge should carefully consider the guidance set out below when making a decision in relation to access. High risk areas where access will not be permitted are identified in section 5.1.

Whenever it is not possible to permit the dog into a particular area, the Person in Charge needs justifiable grounds for doing so.

The Person in Charge should consider whether the care needs of other patients present a reasonable objection to an assistance dog being present in the area.

Reasonable objections include:

- medical conditions or allergies associated with dogs
- mental health issues with dogs including reasonable fear of dogs

Objections under religious beliefs are not considered reasonable<sup>8,9</sup>. This may be a concern for Muslim patients as within the Muslim faith dogs are generally seen in a negative context. In 2003, the Sharia Council, based in the United Kingdom, ruled that a ban on dogs does not apply to Guide Dogs<sup>13</sup>.

Where reasonable objections exist, staff should try and make adjustments. For example, if the patient could be cared for in another area of the ward or side room, if one is available, this should be considered.

### 5.1 Justifiable Separation

Infection control and patient safety remain paramount. Assistance dogs will generally be permitted access into wards and other hospital areas, GP surgeries and clinics with the **exception of any high risk area**.

High risk areas include:

- High Dependency Wards
- Intensive Care Units
- Operating Theatres
- Day Surgery Units (primary recovery rooms)
- Haematology Wards
- Oncology Wards
- Transplant Units

The care of assistance dogs should be discussed with the patient and where patients will use 'high risk' services then alternative arrangements for care of the animal should be considered.

However, where this is not possible, the assistance dogs can be kept in a quiet area, office or duty room. Check with other members of staff if this is appropriate. The dogs can be left alone but should be checked on a regular basis. In the event of separation of the assistance dog from its owner, staff should ensure this is for as short a time as possible. **Further good practice is described in appendix A.**

## **6. Hygiene and Infection Control**

Staff, patients and visitors must ensure they follow hand washing and infection control procedures at all times. Assistance dog owners should also be given hand gel and follow the same infection control procedures as all visitors.

Areas where assistance dogs have visited should be cleaned on a daily basis as part of the usual cleaning schedule<sup>9</sup>. If the assistance dog accidentally fouls within the NHS premises blood and body fluid spillage policies should be consulted and followed. Cleaning of the area should be carried out as per existing protocols.

For further assistance or information Staff can contact local Infection Control Teams.

## **7. Responsibilities**

### **7.1 Responsibilities of Staff**

All staff should have a clear understanding of the Assistance Dog Policy. Staff should be aware of the different types of support provided by assistance dogs and the support needs of patients when the patient or visitor has been separated from the assistance dog.

The best way to identify the needs of patients or visitors is to ask.

It is important that staff recognise the assistance dog is a working dog and should try to minimise distractions.

Staff are responsible for implementing existing local infection control and cleaning protocols as necessary.

Staff are asked to consider the care needs of patients, visitors and their dogs as outlined in this document and as appropriate to the situation.

People in Charge are asked to consider this guidance when determining whether there is any reasonable justification to deny access to an assistance dog.

## **7.2 Responsibilities of Assistance Dog Owners**

The responsibility and care of the assistance dog is at all times that of its owner.

The owner should check with the hospital ward area to be visited prior to arrival if the area is a high risk area and if so take this into account.

On arrival the patient or visitor should report to the ward or reception area.

The owner should ensure the dog is fit and well and care regimes follow guidance provided by Assistance Dogs UK.

The owner should follow the infection control policy of the area to be visited, including the use of hand gel provided for all visitors<sup>9, 10, 11</sup>.

## **8. Communication and Implementation Plan**

### **Key Groups:**

A communication plan will be developed to support the launch and the promotion of the Policy, targeting key staff groups including:

- Facilities Managers
- Practice Managers
- Person in Charge
- Reception Staff

## **9. Reporting & Monitoring**

Monitoring of the policy and guidance will be by exception, with routine monitoring of complaints through existing complaints arrangements within Directorates or Partnerships.

## 10. Impact Assessment

- An Impact Assessment was undertaken and is available on [www.equality.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.equality.scot.nhs.uk)

## 11. Review

- The policy will be reviewed in three years or sooner if there are any changes required under legislation.

### **For further information or advice contact**

Anne Taylor  
Senior Equality and Diversity Adviser  
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde  
Dalian House  
350 St Vincent Street  
Glasgow G3 8YY

Telephone: 0141 201 4973

**E-mail: [anne.taylor@ggc.nhs.scot.uk](mailto:anne.taylor@ggc.nhs.scot.uk)**

## References

1. NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Equality Scheme
2. Fair for all-Disability Positive Action – Real Change: Improving services for disabled people: NHS Scotland (2008) Glasgow NHS
3. Guide Dogs for the Blind (2009) accessed March 2009  
[http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/fileadmin/gdba/images/downloads/OpenDoorsInnerLR\\_Dec2008.pdf](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/fileadmin/gdba/images/downloads/OpenDoorsInnerLR_Dec2008.pdf)
4. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and 2005
5. Canine Partners accessed March 2009  
[http://www.caninepartners.co.uk/about\\_us/](http://www.caninepartners.co.uk/about_us/)
6. The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association Magazine - Forward (Spring 2009) p22
7. Hearing Dogs accessed March 2009 <http://www.hearingdogs.org.uk/>
8. Know Your Rights Assistance Dog Owners: Disability Rights Commission
9. Assistance Dog Policy: Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospital NHS Trust
10. Assistance Dog Owners' Policy: Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
11. Guide Dogs, Hearing Dogs and Pat A Dogs Policy: East Cheshire NHS Trust
12. Guide Dogs for the Blind (2009) accessed March 2009  
[http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public\\_how\\_toguide.hcsp#P4\\_320](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_how_toguide.hcsp#P4_320)
13. [http://www.mcb.org.uk/article\\_detail.php?article=announcement-745](http://www.mcb.org.uk/article_detail.php?article=announcement-745)

## Appendix A

### Background and Good Practice

#### Role of assistance Dogs

Canine Partners aim to help improve access, mobility, independence and quality of life. Many disabled people rely on an assistance dog as an aid to their mobility and would find day to day living extremely difficult without this help<sup>5</sup>.

Currently, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association cares for almost 8,000 dogs; nearly 4,500 are working dogs, 350 are breeding stock, over 1,000 are puppies, 500 are in training and 850 are retired<sup>6</sup>. The cost of breeding, training and maintaining a Guide Dog over its lifetime is £35,000<sup>8</sup>.

A Guide Dog is highly trained and its owner will have had specialised training in the safe and effective use of their dog. Assistance dogs are taught how to be well behaved. They sit or lie next to their owners and they are trained to go to the toilet on demand<sup>3</sup>. (The assistance dogs are toileted prior to leaving home and again before entering any buildings.)

As members of the Assistance Dogs UK, Guide dog owners carry a card advising that Guide Dogs should not be a risk to hygiene. The dogs are groomed daily and they are also checked regularly by veterinarians<sup>3</sup>. They comply with strict guidelines and therefore there is no need for staff to ask for vaccination certificates.

Nine million of the UK population experience some degree of hearing loss. Over 650,000 of these people are profoundly deaf and could benefit from Hearing Dogs. These dogs can alert their owners to sounds that hearing people take for granted, for example a fire alarm. They help their owners with safety and provide them with greater independence. To date, The Hearing Dogs for Deaf People have placed more than 1,500 dogs throughout the UK<sup>7</sup>.

## Good Practice

### Approaching patient and dog

If a Guide Dog harness handle is down, this means the owner may like your help or that the dog is “off duty”. If the person has requested your assistance you should approach the person from the opposite side to where the assistance dog is. Do not take the harness handle or the lead as these are what the owner uses to control the dog.

When being guided, some people like to walk by your side, others may request that you walk in front of the dog and they will follow. **Always ask the person’s preference.** Remember to offer clear directions when guiding a disabled person who has requested your assistance<sup>12</sup>.

If the person is deafblind, approach face on and try to speak to them first; if there is no response, gently tap the person on the shoulder or arm, try speech again or if the person uses a deafblind manual a hand may be raised by the person to indicate you should use the deafblind manual or the block alphabet. If staff are unaware of how to use the deafblind manual, the block alphabet can be easily used by tracing each letter onto the palm of the deafblind person’s hand.

### Care of dog on separation from owner

It is important to remember the dog may show signs of distress if its owner is unwell and if it has to be removed from its owner’s side. It may be necessary to house the dog temporarily in the ward duty room, quiet area or an office.

The assistance dog should be kept as near to the owner as possible and it should be separated from its owner for as short a time as possible. This would only be an emergency measure until contact has been made with an Assistance Dog organisation. The dog should not be tethered to a radiator, placed in direct sunlight or near electrical plugs.

The dog should be offered a bowl of water; feeding arrangements will be carried out by the appropriate Assistance Dog organisation.

Assistance dogs are usually toileted by their owners prior to leaving home and again prior to entering buildings. In an emergency admission it may be necessary to take the dog outside for toileting at least once after arrival. If this exceeds a three hour period, the dog should be taken outside again. The faeces should be double bagged, put in a clinical waste bin and removed immediately (or follow local spillage policies).

It is the owner’s responsibility to make sure the dog is toileted prior to entering the premises. If the dog fouls within the hospital, the owner is responsible for cleaning up after the dog. However, if the patient is not able to attend to this due to their disability, this should be reported to a member of staff in order that arrangements

can be made to clean the area. If this occurs then the local spillage policy should be followed. The incidence of this situation arising will be very rare.

Any staff caring for the dog should follow strict hand washing and infection control policies<sup>9, 10, 11</sup>.

## Appendix B

### Useful Telephone Numbers and Addresses

#### **Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Glasgow)**

West of Scotland District Team

Axis House

12 Auchingramont Road

Hamilton

ML3 6JT member Assistance Dogs (UK)

Telephone: 0845 372 7436

Out of hours (emergencies only) 0870 609 2219

**Website:** [www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk)

#### **Hearing Dogs for Deaf People (Glasgow)**

29 Craigiehall Cr

Erskine

PA8 7DD member Assistance Dogs (UK)

Telephone: 0141 812 6542

#### **Hearing Dogs for Deaf People**

The Beatrice Wright Training Centre (North)

Office hours 0175 932 2256

Out of hours 0797 673 7427

**Website:** [www.hearingdogs.org.uk](http://www.hearingdogs.org.uk)

#### **Canine Partners**

Mill Lane

Heyshott

Midhurst

West Sussex

GU29 0ED member Assistance Dogs (UK)

Telephone: 0845 658 0480

**Website:** [www.caninepartners.co.uk](http://www.caninepartners.co.uk)

### **Support Dogs**

21 Jessops Riverside  
Brightside Lane  
Sheffield  
S9 2RX                      member Assistance Dogs (UK)

Telephone: 0114 261 7800

Website: [www.support-dogs.org.uk](http://www.support-dogs.org.uk)

### **Dogs for the Disabled**

The Frances Hay Centre  
Blacklocks Hill  
Banbury  
OX17 2BS                      member Assistance Dogs (UK)

Telephone: 01295 252 600

Website: [www.dogsforthedisabled.org.uk](http://www.dogsforthedisabled.org.uk)

### **Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB)**

12-14 Hillside Crescent  
Edinburgh  
EH7 5EA

Telephone: 0131 652 3140

Website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

### **Deafblind Scotland,**

21 Alexandra Avenue,  
Lenzie  
G66 5BG

Telephone 0141 777 6111

Website: [www.deafblindscotland.org.uk](http://www.deafblindscotland.org.uk)

### **Deaf Connections**

100 Norfolk Street  
Glasgow  
G5 9EJ

Telephone: 0141 420 1759 (voice or text)

Website: [www.deafconnections.co.uk](http://www.deafconnections.co.uk)

**Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID)**

Amy Doyle office coordinator  
Empire House  
131 West Nile Street  
Glasgow  
G1 2RX

Telephone: 0141 341 5330

**Website:** [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

**Sense Scotland**

43 Middlesex Street  
Kinning Park  
Glasgow  
G41 1EE

Telephone: 0141 429 0294

**Website:** [www.sensescotland.org.uk](http://www.sensescotland.org.uk)

## Useful Websites

[www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk)

[www.fairforalldisability.org.uk](http://www.fairforalldisability.org.uk)

[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

[www.deafblindscotland.org.uk](http://www.deafblindscotland.org.uk)

[www.deafconnections.co.uk](http://www.deafconnections.co.uk)

[www.hearingdogs.org.uk](http://www.hearingdogs.org.uk)

[www.support-dogs.org.uk](http://www.support-dogs.org.uk)

[www.caninepartners.co.uk](http://www.caninepartners.co.uk)

[www.sensescotland.org.uk](http://www.sensescotland.org.uk)

[www.equalitiesinhealth.org](http://www.equalitiesinhealth.org)