



## AODA: Persons with Disability and Their Service Animals

PURPOSE	
<p>Dryden Regional Health Centre (DRHC) is committed to fostering an atmosphere which removes and prevents barriers that impact the accessibility of people with disabilities. This includes patients, families, staff, physicians, volunteers, and members of DRHC's community. DRHC acknowledges the vital relationship and dependency which exists between a person with disabilities and their service animal. DRHC staff/physicians and volunteers will ensure that they make all reasonable efforts to accommodate persons with disabilities and their service animals.</p>	
RELATED DOCUMENTATION	
<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IPC: Animal and Pet Visits</li> <li>• Animal Visitation Record</li> </ul>	<p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://aoda.ca/understanding-service-animals/">https://aoda.ca/understanding-service-animals/</a></li> </ul>
DEFINITIONS/ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS	
Disability	<p>According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, a "Disability" is defined as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,</li> <li>2. a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,</li> <li>3. a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,</li> <li>4. a mental disorder, or</li> <li>5. an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.</li> </ol> <p>The definition includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities, and disabilities the effects of which may come and go.</p>
Emotional Support Animal (ESA)	<p>Sometimes referred to as an assistance animal – is an animal that provides companionship, comfort, support, and security to individuals who suffer from mental or emotional, and sometimes physical illnesses or disabilities. They are not like any other companion pets as their presence may alleviate stress and restore mental well-being without having to receive special training. However, they do not have the same certification or status as a service animal and are not covered under the definition of an AODA Service Animal.</p>
Personal Pet	<p>An animal kept by an individual for pleasure or companionship. A personal pet visit may be the best treatment intervention for the health and well being of a patient in special situations. Personal pet visits are usually used for long-term or terminally ill patients. Personal pets are not covered under the AODA Service Animal definition.</p>
AODA	<p>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act</p>



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**PROCEDURE**

**Service Animals**

Service animals are animals, typically dogs, trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a persons with a disability, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. For example, they perform tasks, such as:

- Guiding a blind or visually impaired handler around obstacles
- Alerting a handler with diabetes about low blood sugar levels
- Protecting a handler with epilepsy during seizures
- Calming a handler with autism in an environment with too much sensory stimulation
- Retrieving out-of-reach objects for a handler with a physical disability
- Alerting a handler who is deaf or hard of hearing about sounds

A person with a disability requiring a service animal may be an employee, a visitor, a contractor, or a patient.

**Service Animal – Risk Assessment**

There is no evidence or reports that a well-behaved and well-trained service animal poses a more significant risk of transmitting infection than people; therefore, service animals should not be excluded from such areas, unless an individual patient’s situation or a particular animal poses a greater risk that cannot be mitigated through reasonable measures.

If required, a risk assessment to determine that a service animal poses a direct threat must be based on an individualized assessment of the service animal, the patient, and the health-care situation. When evaluating the risk, consideration should be given to the nature of the risk (duration and severity); the probability that injury will occur; and whether reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures will mitigate the risk. The person with the disability must be a part of the risk-assessment process when possible.

Service animals are not permitted into the Operating Room or Post Anesthetic Care area as general infection control measures dictate limited access.

**Identification**

There are two ways that service providers can tell whether a patient’s animal is a service animal:

1. It is visibly apparent that the patient requires the animal for reasons relating to disability; or
2. the patient provides an identification card, or a letter from a healthcare practitioner, confirming that there is a requirement for the animal for reasons relating to a disability; or
3. Service animals may wear a harness or vest as a visible identifier that displays it is a service animal.

**Employees with a Service Animal**

DRHC Human Resources and the department service manager will work with the staff member to develop an accommodation plan to support employees with a service animal. This will apply to all areas of the facility, with the exception of places where the law excludes service animals.

**Inpatients/Outpatients/Visitors**

1. Patients with disabilities are requested to inform hospital staff as early in the pre-admit process as possible of the need for their service animal to stay with them in hospital.
2. In planning for a hospital admission/visit, staff must consider the following:
  - The wellbeing of the patient.
  - The wellbeing of the service animal.

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- The patient's and service animal's previous experience with hospitals.
  - The anticipated length of stay.
  - Implications for patients sharing space in the vicinity.
  - Implications for staff/physicians/volunteers.
3. The requirements surrounding the admission/visit of a patient with a service animal will be assessed individually. The service animal will be allowed to remain with the patient provided the following provisions have been made:
- There are no Infection Prevention & Control reasons that would preclude the service animal's presence.
  - Ideally the patient will be placed in a private room. If there is no private room available, nursing staff must ensure that there are no circumstances that would adversely influence the wellbeing of the patient's roommates. For example, allergies, cynophobia (fear of dogs), or some other unacceptable level of risk.
  - The patient should assume full responsibility for the care and behaviour of the service animal at all times. The patient may delegate this responsibility to family or friends if necessary.
  - Service animals are not permitted to accompany a patient into the Operating Room or Post Anesthetic Care Unit. At the discretion of the manager and attending physician, service animals may be permitted a short visit to their owner in the CCA area.
  - If the patient requests their service animal remain with them overnight, an animal care plan must be developed.
  - Standard cleaning procedures are sufficient following occupation of an area by a service animal.
  - At no time will hospital staff assume responsibility for meeting the service animal's needs for exercise, nutrition, elimination, etc.
  - Nursing staff are required to notify support departments (e.g. Telehealth, Cafeteria, Diagnostic Imaging) in advance when a patient will be accompanied by a service animal.
  - **ALERT** Pending consultation with and on the approval of IPC and Nurse Manager, service animals of visitors may be allowed entry to an isolation room.

**How to Interact with the Patient and Service Animal**

1. Pay attention to the owner, not the animal
2. Ask what tasks the animal assists with
3. Avoid petting or talking to a service animal; the animal is working and must not be distracted from its tasks
4. Do not request the service animal to be left in a different location such as outside an office.

**Emotional Support Animals**

Service animals have training to perform specific tasks for people with disabilities. Emotional support animals provide comfort and security. However, they do not have training for specific tasks. Therefore, emotional support animals do not qualify as service animals under the AODA act. Emotional support animal visitation is covered in the [IPC: Animal and Pet Visits Procedure on OMNI](#).

**Documentation**

Please complete the linked animal visitation record and store on patient chart.

<b>FORMS / RECORDS</b>
Animal visitation record

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**REFERENCES**

<https://aoda.ca/understanding-service-animals/>

<https://sunnybrook.ca/content/?page=care-access-policy-animals>

<https://www.aoda.ca/what%20s-up-with-the-rules-around-emotional-support-animals-on-campus/>

<https://aoda.ca/service-animals-in-the-workplace-are-they-allowed/>

CDC and HICPAC. Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Healthcare Facilities. Atlanta GA: CDC; 2003. pp120-125.

**IF APPLICABLE – APPROVED BY COMMITTEE I.E. BOARD OF DIRECTORS, JOHSC ETC.**

Reviewed by email by the AODA Committee – August 2022

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