Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

National Principles for the Regulation of Assistance Animals

Consultation Report

Contents

Overview 4
Background 4
2021 Consultation 5
2025 Consultation 6
Accessibility 6
Survey Results: Who we heard from 7
General information 7
State or territory survey respondents 7
Area where survey respondents lived 7
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents 8
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) respondents 8
Type of submission: individual or organisation 9
How survey respondents described themselves 9
Respondents with assistance animals 10
Assistance Animal Handlers 10
Type of assistance animals 10
Funding for assistance animals 10
Accreditation for assistance animals 11
Challenges experienced by assistance animal handlers 11
Access to transport 11
Access to accommodation and public spaces 12
Limited education in relation to assistance animals 12
Other challenges 12
What we heard about the principles 13
Principle 1 - Nationally consistent accreditation requirements for assistance animal trainers and/or training organisations 14
Principle 2 - Minimum assistance animal training standards 15
Principle 3 - A single national Public Access Test (PAT) for assistance animals 16
Principle 4 - Evidence of disability and a need for an assistance animal 17
Improving Principles 1 to 4 based on feedback 18

Principle 5 - National identity card and logo 19
Important features of a national identity card 19
Concerns about a national card 20
Other themes 20
Principle 6 – Animal Welfare 21
Improving Principles 5 and 6 based on feedback 22
Additional feedback on the draft principles from respondents 22
Conclusion 23
What these results say about the draft principles 23
Next Steps 23
Acknowledgements 24

Overview

Australia does not have a single national approach to recognising or regulating assistance animals. Because of this, people who rely on assistance animals may be uncertain about their access rights. Businesses, transport providers and service staff may also be unsure about their responsibilities.

To help improve consistency, the Australian Government worked with state and territory governments to develop draft National Principles for Assistance Animals (the principles). The purpose of the principles is to describe common features that all Australian jurisdictions should adopt in order to work towards national consistency. They address accreditation for both training organisations and the animals they train. The principles also cover evidence requirements, public access tests and a national identity card, and address animal welfare.

The Australian Government asked the public to provide feedback on the draft principles. This report outlines what was heard through that consultation. It describes the issues raised by assistance animal handlers and summarises feedback on the proposed principles.

Many responses came from people with lived experience. More than 60 per cent of survey respondents said they use an assistance animal. Overall, feedback was positive. More than 70 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the principles. However, many respondents said that the principles alone are not enough. They highlighted the need for greater public understanding of assistance animal handler rights.

Some submissions raised concerns about terminology. In particular, respondents felt the term “assistance animal user” did not reflect the relationship between a person and their animal. For this reason, this report mainly uses the term “handler”.

Based on the feedback received, the wording of the principles has been changed to make it clearer and easier to understand. The next stage for this work is to consider how the principles will be implemented in each jurisdiction in order to achieve national consistency.

Background

Assistance animals are trained to help people with disability live more independently and safely in their everyday lives. They support a wide range of needs. This includes sensory, physical and psychosocial disability. Assistance animals can help with daily tasks. They play an important role in supporting the wellbeing and independence of people with disability.

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) explains what counts as an assistance animal.

Under subsection 9(2) of the DDA, an assistance animal is a dog or another animal that meets one of the following requirements:

(a) accredited under a law of a state or territory that provides for the accreditation of animals trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability, or
(b) accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph, or
(c) trained:

i. to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability, and
ii. to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

Not all states and territories have laws to accredit assistance animals for the purposes of the DDA. Where accreditation systems do exist, the rules differ between jurisdictions. These differences can create challenges for assistance animal handlers. This can include while travelling by air or accessing accommodation and services.

To address these issues, Australian, state and territory governments are working together to develop a more nationally consistent approach to the accreditation and regulation of assistance animals. The aim is to improve understanding, recognition and acceptance of assistance animals across Australia.

This work is led by the Assistance Animal Working Group (AAWG). The group includes representatives from Australian Government, state and territory agencies.

The AAWG was previously coordinated by the Department of Social Services. Responsibility for this work now sits with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

2021 Consultation

DSS previously conducted a public consultation by survey in 2021, to seek public views, ideas and experiences about assistance animals. The survey was made available on DSS Engage from 26 March to 7 May 2021.

There were 545 responses to the survey. The responses demonstrated strong support for the development of a nationally consistent approach to the regulation and accreditation of assistance animals.

A clear majority of respondents (around 95%) agreed that the principles should include one or more of the following:

- accreditation requirements for assistance animal trainers and/or training organisations
- assistance animal training standards
- a single national Public Access Test (PAT), and/or
- a national identity card and logo.

Respondents were also invited to share other suggestions to help address the challenges faced by assistance animal owners:

- 35% emphasised a need for greater investment in public education about assistance animals
- 21% identified the need for national recognition and/or a scheme to reduce problems associated with public access and travel
- 18% expressed a need for quality assurance in the training and accreditation of assistance animals
- 14% were concerned about the cost of accrediting and certifying an assistance animal, and

- 12% indicated that people sometimes confuse assistance animals with other service animals. For example, therapy animals, emotional support animals, and companion animals.

Using feedback from 2021, the Australian Government worked with states, territories, and other government agencies to develop draft principles. These draft principles were:

1. Nationally consistent accreditation requirements for assistance animal trainers and/or training organisations
2. Minimum assistance animal training standards
3. A single national Public Access Test (PAT) for assistance animals
4. Evidence of disability and a need for an assistance animal
5. National identity card and logo
6. Animal welfare

These draft principles were used as the basis for the Public Consultation conducted in 2025.

2025 Consultation

Public consultation on the draft principles ran between 7 March 2025 and 1 June 2025 on DSS Engage (online consultation platform). Respondents were able to complete a survey. It collected basic demographic information and sought their views, experiences and feedback. Respondents were also able to make written submissions by email, post, or other accessible formats.

All submissions received were either survey responses or written submissions. Some respondents chose to do both.

The consultation link was also sent to known contacts, including Disability Representative Organisations. It was promoted through departmental social media channels. Due to the 2025 federal election, there were limits on how much promotion and discussion could take place.

In total, 376 submissions were received. 327 of these submissions were survey responses submitted through DSS Engage. The remainder were written submissions received via email. Extensions were provided to individuals and organisations that requested more time to submit a written response via email.

Department officials read each submission and identified key themes for further analysis. This consultation report is based on that analysis. It has also been used to make suggested revisions to the draft principles.

No AI or machine learning tools were used in the preparation of this report or the analysis of submissions.

No directly identifying information has been included in this report.

Accessibility

DSS Engage is a website for public consultations and is designed to meet Australian Government standards. This includes those that relate to access for people with disability.

The website aims to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA.

Consultation materials were made available in Easy Read and Auslan formats.

Survey Results: Who we heard from

This section outlines the background of respondents who made submissions to the 2025 survey via DSS Engage.

General information

State or territory survey respondents

Of the 327 survey submissions received, the majority of respondents were from Queensland (27%), New South Wales (24%), Victoria (19%) and South Australia (12%). Survey submissions from the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australia made up less than 20% of overall survey submissions.

These figures are broadly in line with the general Australian population, with the exception that Queensland is somewhat overrepresented in the consultation data.

Area where survey respondents lived

Most respondents said that they lived in a city (52%), followed by those living in a regional area (35%). The smallest number of responses were received from people living in a rural or remote location (8%).

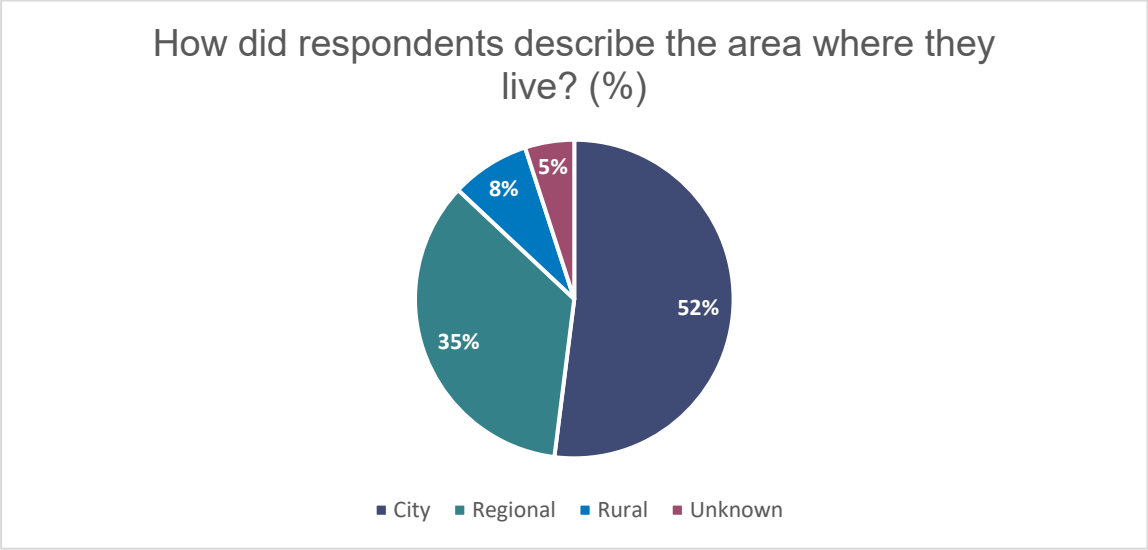

Figure 1: Location of survey respondents.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents

Of the respondents that chose to answer, around 3% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

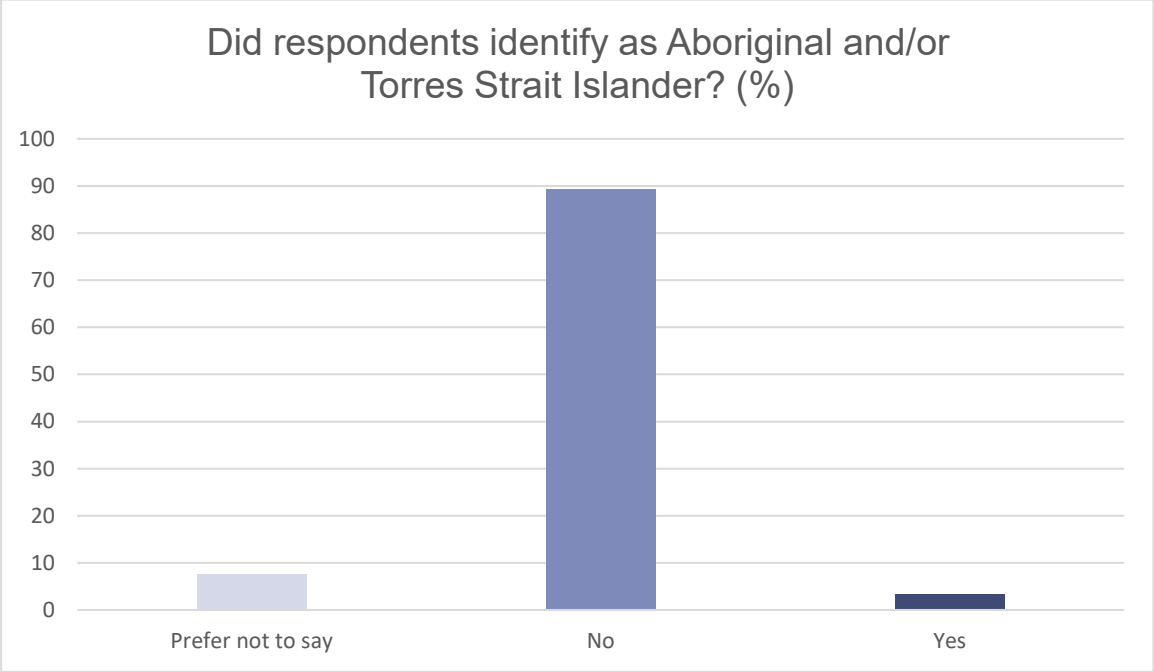

Figure 2: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) respondents

Around 9% of respondents identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

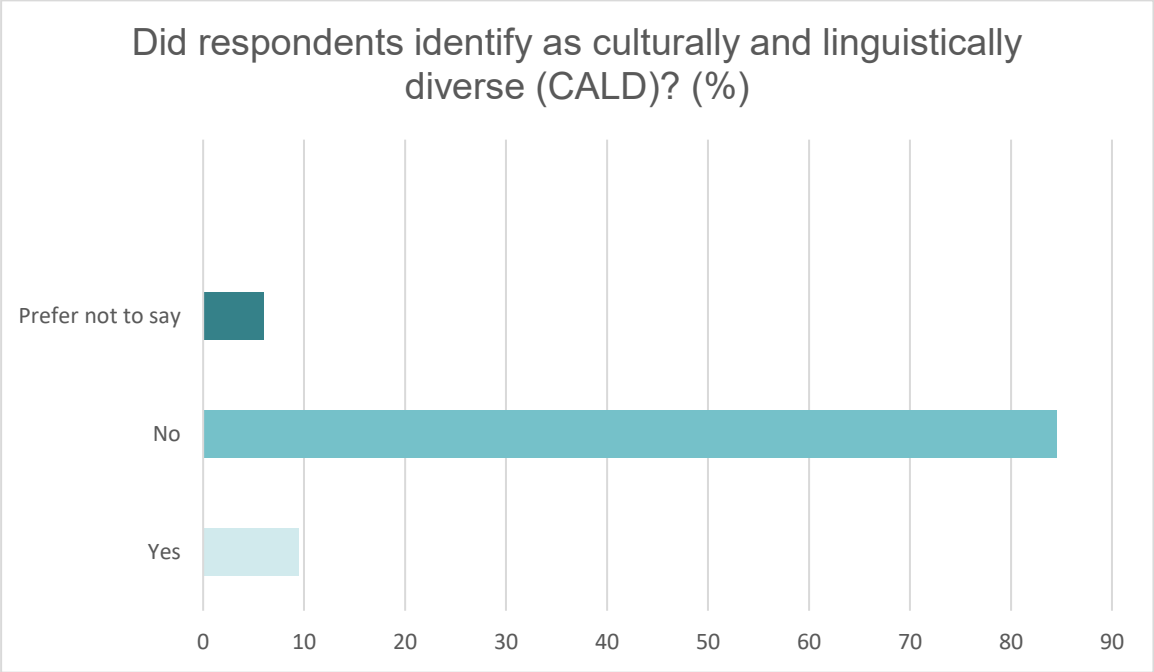

Figure 3: Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) respondents.

Type of submission: individual or organisation

Around 78% of submissions received through DSS engage were from individuals, with 18% of the survey submissions made on behalf of organisations.

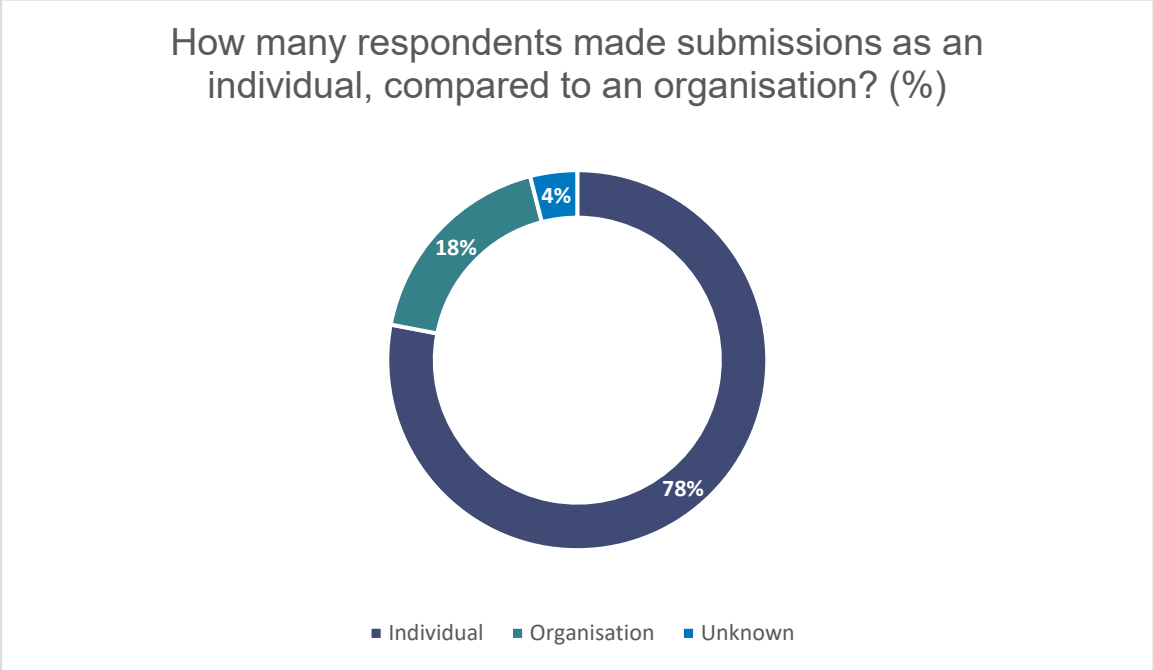

Figure 4: Submissions made by an individual or an organisation.

How survey respondents described themselves

The majority of survey respondents were people with disability (69%), followed by advocates for people with disability (22%), assistance animal trainers (19%), and carers, family members or friends of a person with disability (18%). Please note, respondents were able to select multiple identifiers, resulting in the total number of responses exceeding 100%.

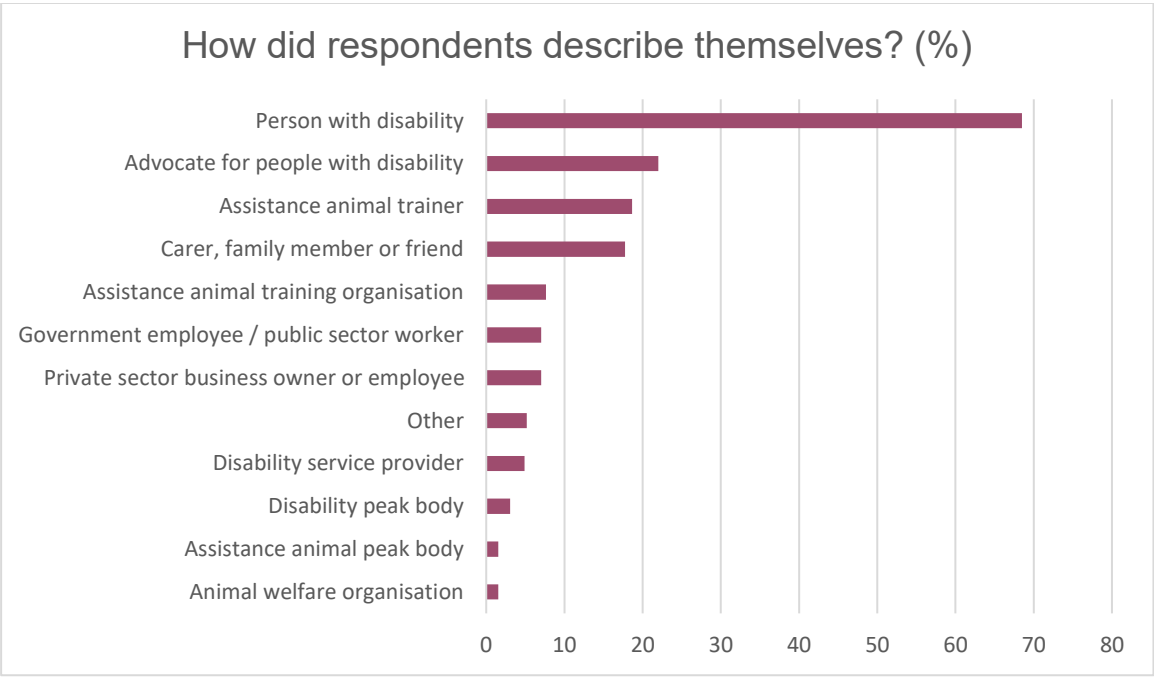

Figure 4: Categories chosen by respondents to describe themselves.

Respondents with assistance animals

Over half of survey respondents (62%) reported that they personally use an assistance animal.

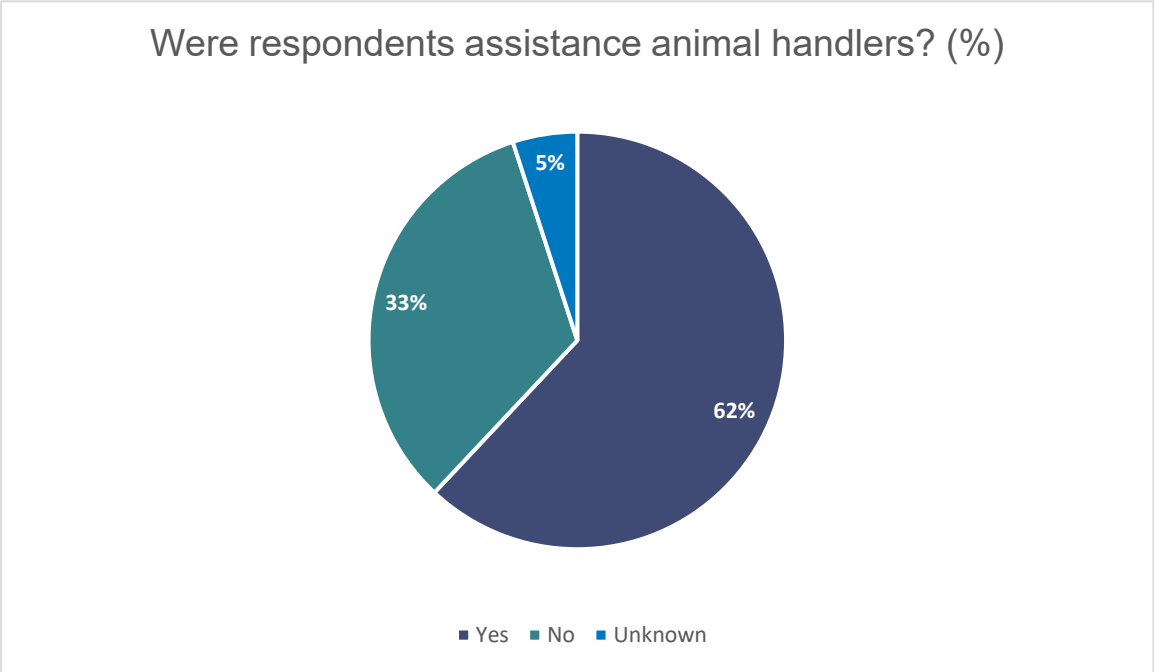

Figure 5: Respondents who identified as an assistance animal handler.

Assistance Animal Handlers

Type of assistance animals

Of the 201 respondents that have an assistance animal, 96% indicated that their assistance animal is a dog. Around 85% have an assistance dog other than a guide dog, seeing eye dog or hearing dog. Five individuals reported using an assistance animal other than a dog (such as a cat or bird), with one organisation identifying a range of animals they consider suitable to serve as assistance animals.

Funding for assistance animals

Two-thirds of survey respondents that were assistance animal handlers, funded their assistance animal personally/privately. This was followed by assistance animals funded through the Department of Veterans' Affairs Psychiatric Assistance Dog program (11%). Less than 20 respondents had their assistance animal funded by a charity / non-profit organisation. Similarly, less than 20 respondents had their assistance animal funded by an NDIS plan. No respondent funded their assistance animal through another government program.

Accreditation for assistance animals

Most respondents indicated that they trained their assistance animal themselves or used a trainer to meet the requirements of subsection 9(2)(c) of the DDA (66%). This was followed by assistance animals that had completed a PAT (61%). Please note, survey respondents were able to select all answers that applied, resulting in the total percentage exceeding 100%.

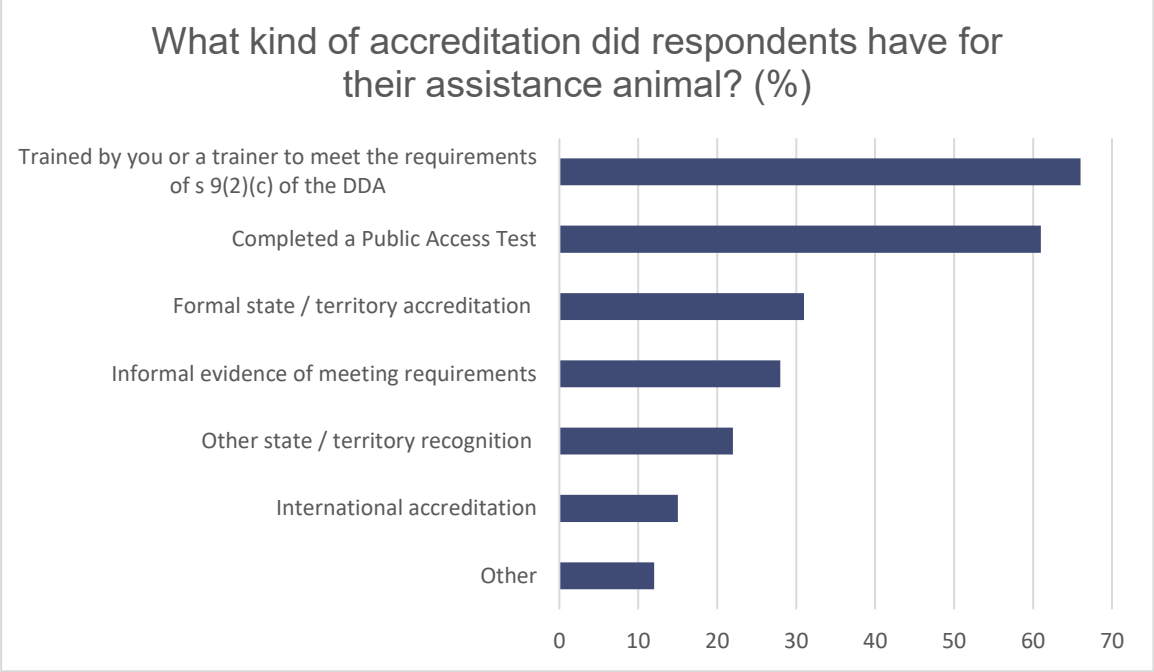

Figure 6: Accreditation arrangements used by assistance animal handlers.

Challenges experienced by assistance animal handlers

Survey respondents with assistance animals reported facing a range of challenges when trying to access public life in the 12 months before they responded to the survey. In fact, 95% of respondents with assistance animals identified experiencing at least one challenge during this time.

Access to transport

Of the assistance animal handlers who answered this question, 59% said they had problems accessing transport. This included public transport, taxis, rideshare services, and air travel.

Responses showed several common issues:

- 34 people reported problems with taxis and rideshare services
- 32 people had trouble using public transport
- 21 people reported issues at airports or with airlines.

A common issue with taxis and rideshares, such as Uber, was drivers cancelling or not arriving after seeing the assistance animal. This often left handlers stranded.

Air travel was also difficult for some handlers. They described unclear boarding rules and long approval processes for assistance animals.

Access to accommodation and public spaces

Many respondents said they had problems accessing public spaces with their assistance animal.

Around 59% said they faced challenges in places like restaurants and cafés. Some handlers said they were asked to sit away from other diners or outside.

Accessing accommodation was also difficult. About 46% of handlers reported problems. Many said accommodation providers refused them because of “no pets” policies. Even when access was allowed, some handlers were charged extra cleaning fees or pet deposits.

These experiences were exhausting and upsetting for assistance animal handlers. Some respondents said it felt easier not to go out at all.

Limited education in relation to assistance animals

Many respondents said there is not enough education about assistance animals.

About 75% of respondents reported problems caused by poor public understanding and attitudes. Many felt this lack of knowledge makes everyday life harder for assistance animal handlers.

Responses showed that different types of education are needed to address these challenges. One common issue was people being denied access to services or public spaces because of their assistance animal’s breed.

Handlers with an “invisible” disability, such as deafness, also reported problems. Some were asked inappropriate or personal questions about their disability. Others said their need for an assistance animal was questioned because they did not “look” like they needed one.

Respondents said better public education about the different tasks assistance animals perform, and how they help people with disability, would reduce these problems.

Education is also needed on how people should behave around assistance animals. Some respondents described members of the public trying to pat, talk to, or feed their assistance animal, which caused ongoing challenges.

Other challenges

Another issue raised in written responses was the problem of “fake” assistance animals. These are animals presented as assistance animals, such as wearing a vest, but without proper training.

Respondents said these animals can harm public trust in assistance animals. Some shared examples of “fake” assistance animals behaving aggressively toward their trained assistance animal.

Submissions also suggested that clearer rules about what qualifies as an assistance animal, and how assistance animals differ from other service animals, would be helpful.

Other challenges raised by respondents included:

- limited accreditation options in rural and remote areas
- too few training organisations
- limited resources and support to address discrimination through the legal process.

While the principles will help address some of these issues, many of these challenges go beyond regulation or accreditation alone. Submissions showed that even handlers with well-known, accredited assistance animals, such as Guide Dogs, face these problems.

Respondents said these issues are likely to continue without broader action, including better public education alongside the principles.

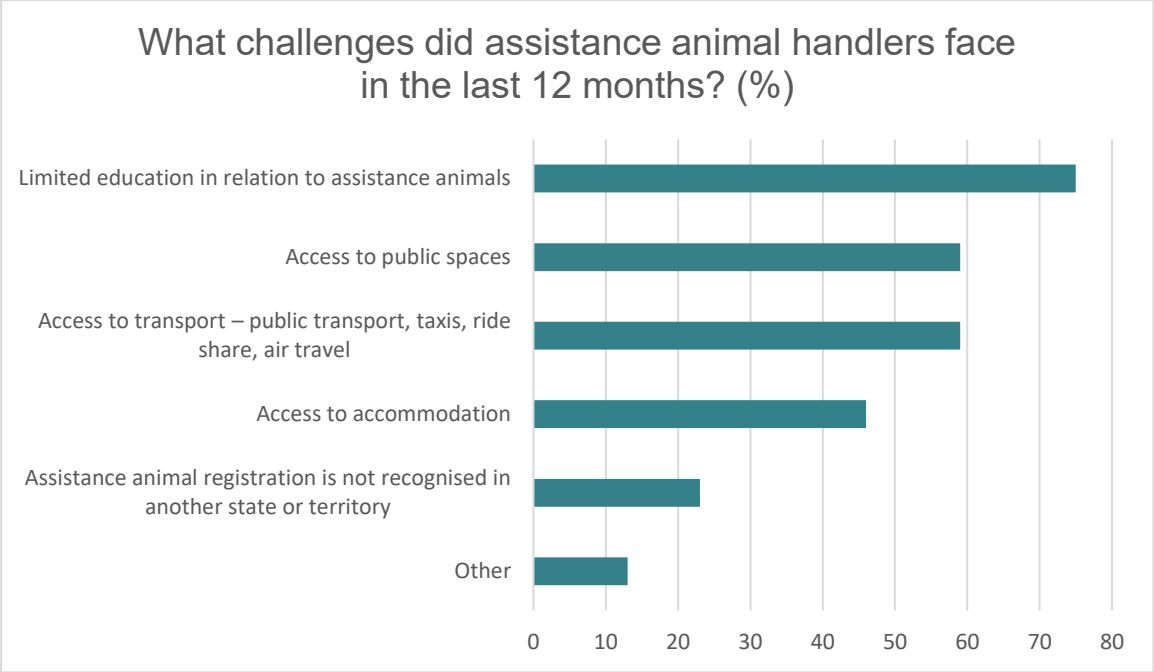

Figure 7: Range of challenges faced by assistance animal handlers in 12 months leading up to consultation. Percentages exceed 100% as respondents could select multiple options.

What we heard about the principles

This section outlines the main themes raised in survey responses and written submissions.

Based on feedback across the draft principles, some respondents said that several were unclear or overlapped with one another.

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing has used this feedback to clarify and improve the draft principles.

To make this report easier to read and avoid repetition, feedback is grouped and presented under each principle.

Principle 1 - Nationally consistent accreditation requirements for assistance animal trainers and/or training organisations

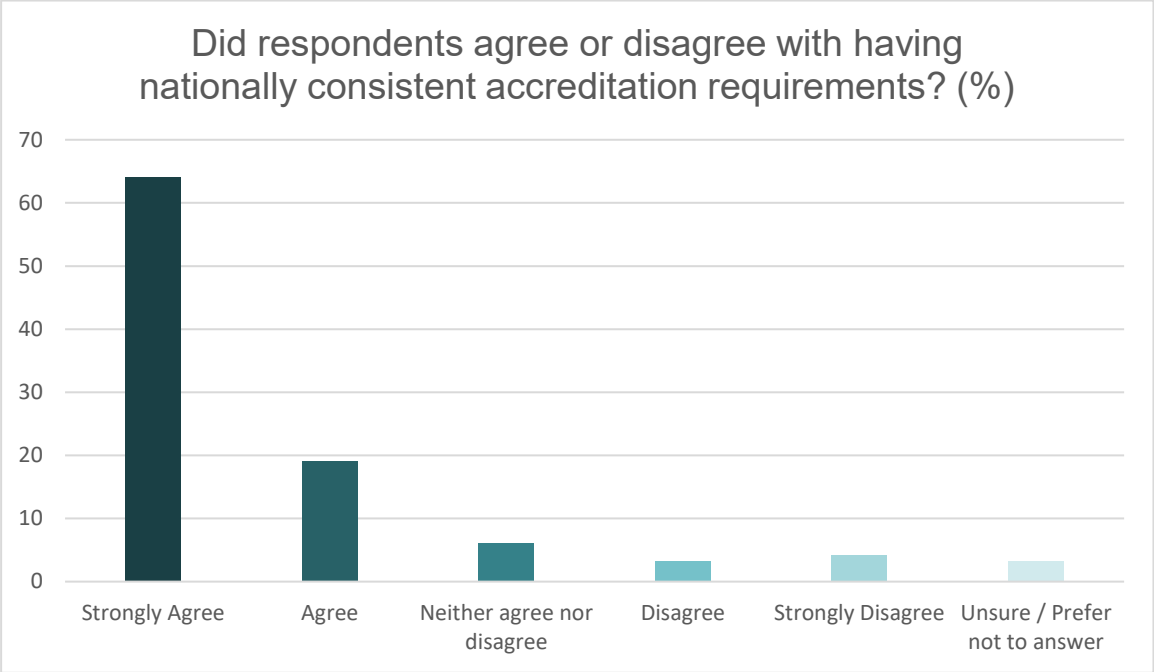

Figure 8: Respondent views on Principle 1: Ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or unsure.

Of the people who answered this question, 64% strongly agreed that Australia needs the same accreditation rules for assistance animal trainers across the country. Respondents said this would help ensure trainers and their animals are recognised everywhere in Australia.

Respondents said accreditation for trainers should include:

- understanding animal welfare
- using kind, reward-based training methods
- having suitable training or qualifications
- experience working with people with disability.

Many respondents thought Principle 1 was about accrediting assistance animals, not just trainers. Most supported a national PAT to check behaviour, cleanliness, and control.

Respondents said any national test must be affordable and easy to access. They said there needs to be enough assessors, especially in regional and remote areas.

Respondents also said owner-trained assistance animals should be able to become accredited, such as by passing a PAT. This is important because registered trainers can be expensive and hard to access, especially outside cities.

Many respondents said accreditation should be free or subsidised. They warned that high costs could stop people from being accredited and increase stress for handlers.

Some respondents said assistance animals in training should be allowed into public spaces. Others supported clear rules and better public education about accreditation.

Some respondents also suggested including medical and veterinary certificates. These would confirm the handler's need for an assistance animal and the animal's health.

Overall, responses showed confusion about what type of accreditation Principle 1 refers to. This shows the draft principles need to be made clearer.

Principle 2 - Minimum assistance animal training standards

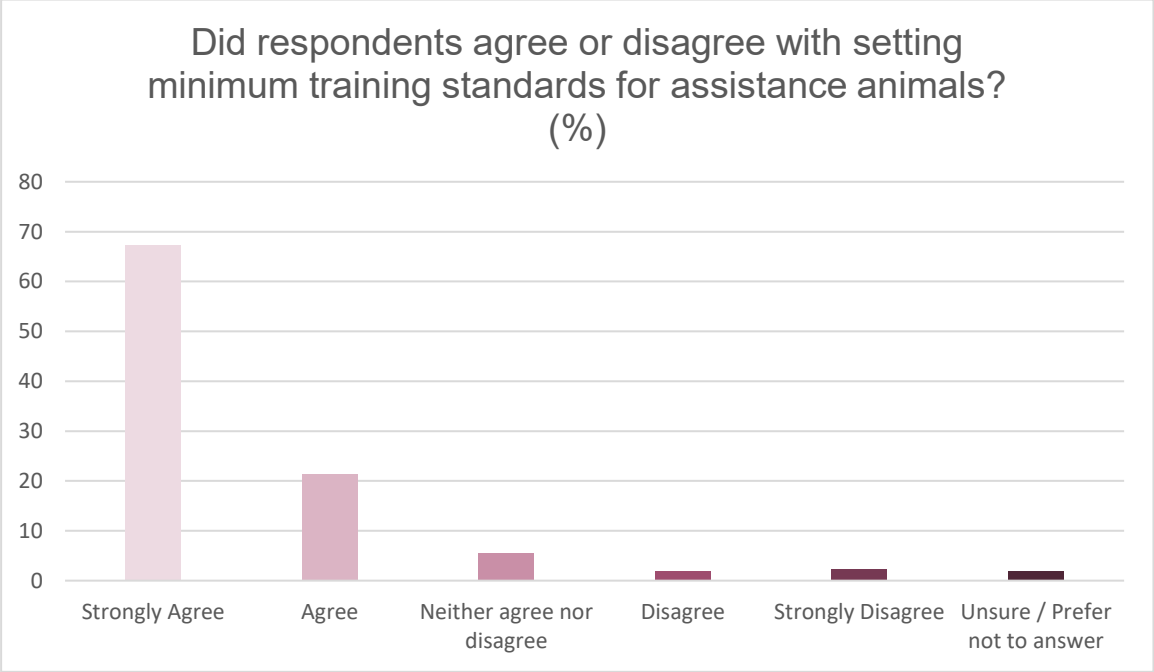

Figure 9: Respondent views on Principle 2: Ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or unsure

Of the people who answered this question, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be minimum training standards for assistance animals.

Respondents said minimum standards would help make training more consistent. This would help people choose a trainer and increase public trust in assistance animals.

Most respondents said a PAT would be a good minimum training standard. They also shared ideas about what the PAT should test, which is discussed further under Principle 3.

Many responses for Principle 2 overlapped with feedback on Principles 1 and 3. This showed that the principles need to be clearer and better explained.

Some respondents said minimum standards should be based on existing rules. This could include those used in Queensland, the DDA, and international standards.

Respondents said using international standards could help reduce problems, especially when travelling overseas.

Principle 3 - A single national Public Access Test (PAT) for assistance animals

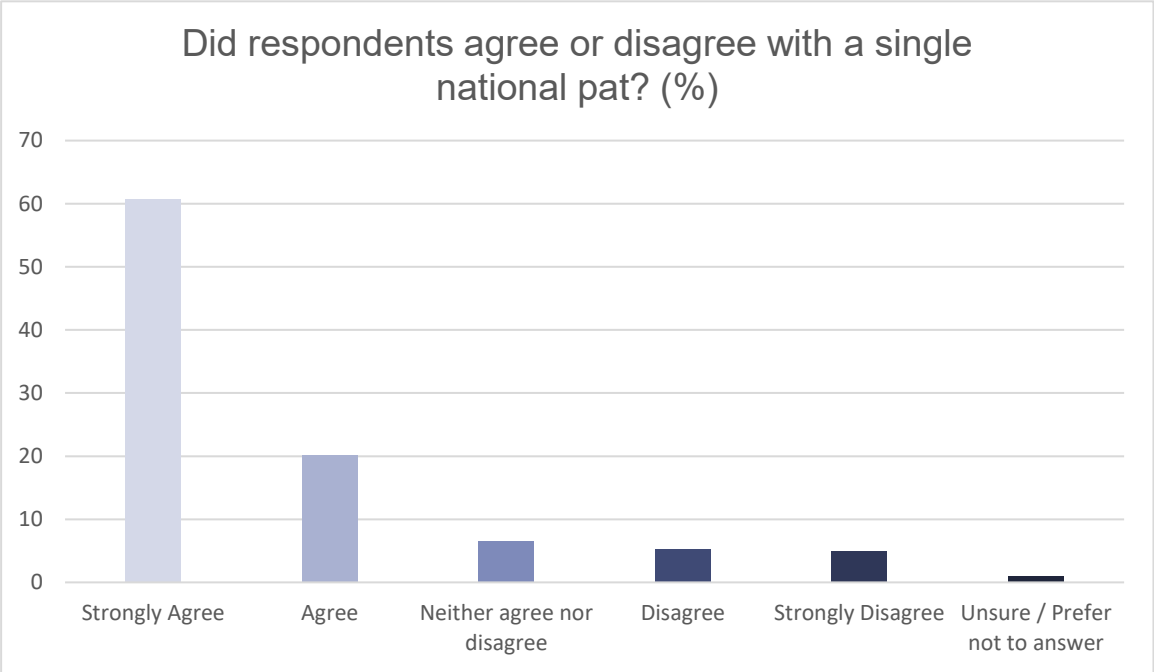

Figure 10: Respondent views on Principle 3: Ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or unsure

More than 80% of respondents supported having one national PAT. A PAT checks that an assistance animal is trained, under control, and can behave safely in public.

Respondents said PAT reassessments should not be too frequent or difficult. Most suggested reassessment every one to three years.

Respondents said a national PAT should check that an assistance animal can:

- enter public places, such as shops and transport
- stay calm in busy or noisy environments
- behave appropriately around other assistance animals
- follow commands and remain under control
- avoid engaging with other people
- perform tasks that support their handler's disability
- meet hygiene standards, such as toilet training
- be handled safely by their handler.

As with Principle 2, respondents said a national PAT could be based on existing standards, such as those used in Queensland and overseas. They also said more trained PAT assessors are needed.

Respondents said some parts of the PAT should be flexible. For example, task checks should allow for different types of assistance animals and different disabilities. Flexibility was seen as especially important for people living in rural and remote areas.

A strong message from respondents was that a national PAT must be accessible and inclusive. They said the PAT should be affordable, or subsidised, so people with disability are not excluded.

Some respondents were concerned about how existing accreditations would be treated. They suggested a transition period to help handlers adjust to any new system.

Principle 4 - Evidence of disability and a need for an assistance animal

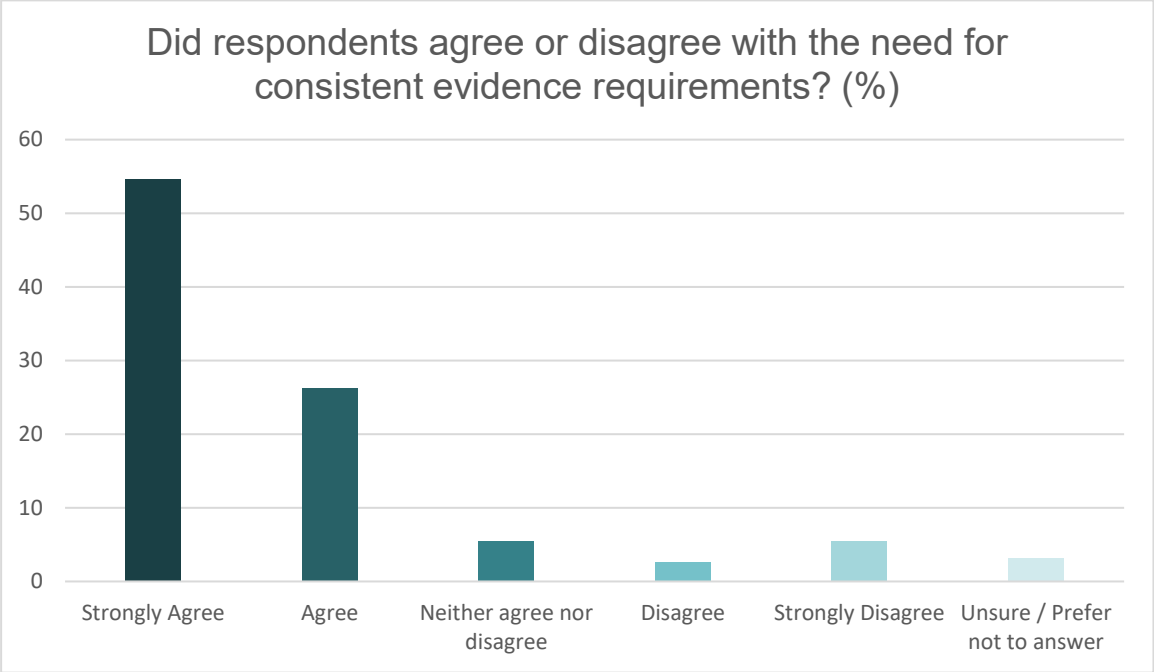

Figure 11: Respondent views on Principle 4: Ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or unsure

Over 50% of survey respondents strongly agreed with the need for there to be consistent evidence requirements across Australia. This will help ensure that assistance animal handlers can expect equal and fair treatment. For background, subsection 54A(5) of the DDA states that it is not discriminatory to ask a person with disability to show evidence that the animal is an assistance animal. However, there is currently no guidance on what documentation is suitable to request. Each state and territory is currently able to set their own requirements.

Responses addressing evidence requirements can be split into two sections. Firstly, responses outlined what evidence should be provided when accrediting an assistance animal. The majority of responses stated that evidence provided for this purpose should include:

- proof that the assistance animal passed a PAT
- a certificate from a medical professional confirming the handler's disability and need for an assistance animal
- a certificate from a veterinary clinic clearing the animal as a suitable assistance animal.

Submissions strongly suggested that this level of evidence should only need to be provided once, when accrediting the assistance animal. Privacy and removing double handling were key themes raised in response to Principle 4.

The second scenario when evidence may be requested is when a handler is trying to access public places with their assistance animal. Responses highlighted how important it is that the handler's disability remains private. Information about the handler's disability should not be requested by the public. Evidence of accreditation, such as a national identity card, should be the only form of evidence businesses request from an assistance animal handler. One submission pointed to the Australian Disability Parking Scheme, as a current working example of evidence requirements for an Australian Disability Parking Permit.

This principle linked heavily to the theme of better public education. Responses highlighted the need for greater public awareness about what questions are appropriate to ask an assistance animal handler. It was suggested by respondents that recognisable national branding could help prevent access issues. For example, a vest could clearly identify an assistance animal that has been tasked to find help for its handler.

Similar to the other principles, it was raised that there would need to be some form of proof available for assistance animals in training.

Improving Principles 1 to 4 based on feedback

Most respondents supported draft principles 1 to 4. However, the feedback showed confusion between the principles, with many comments overlapping or providing similar feedback across different principles. This suggests the Principles need to be more clearly distinguished from one another.

To address this, it is proposed that Principles 1 to 4 be rewritten to better reflect their purpose and the feedback received during the public consultation.

As part of this revision, words were also revised to ensure that each principle accurately reflected the policy intent. For example, the purpose of Principle 3 is that when each jurisdiction establishes a Public Access Test, it meets the same agreed standards, which was not sufficiently clear in the original wording.

The proposed changes are:

- **Principle 1:** Nationally consistent requirements to accredit assistance animal trainers / training organisations
- **Principle 2:** Minimum standards for assistance animals to become accredited
- **Principle 3:** National minimum standards for Public Access Tests (PAT)
- **Principle 4:** Consistent and nationally recognised evidence requirements for assistance animal handlers in public.

These changes aim to reduce confusion about what each principle covers. Many respondents discussed PAT requirements under multiple principles, which showed a need for clearer separation.

For example, Principle 2 will need to clearly state what minimum accreditation standards are required once agreed by all jurisdictions.. A range of feedback was provided on potential standards, documents or tests which could be required. The Australian, state and territory governments will consider implementation of these Principles, including the development of public guidance to explain what each principle includes.

Principle 5 - National identity card and logo

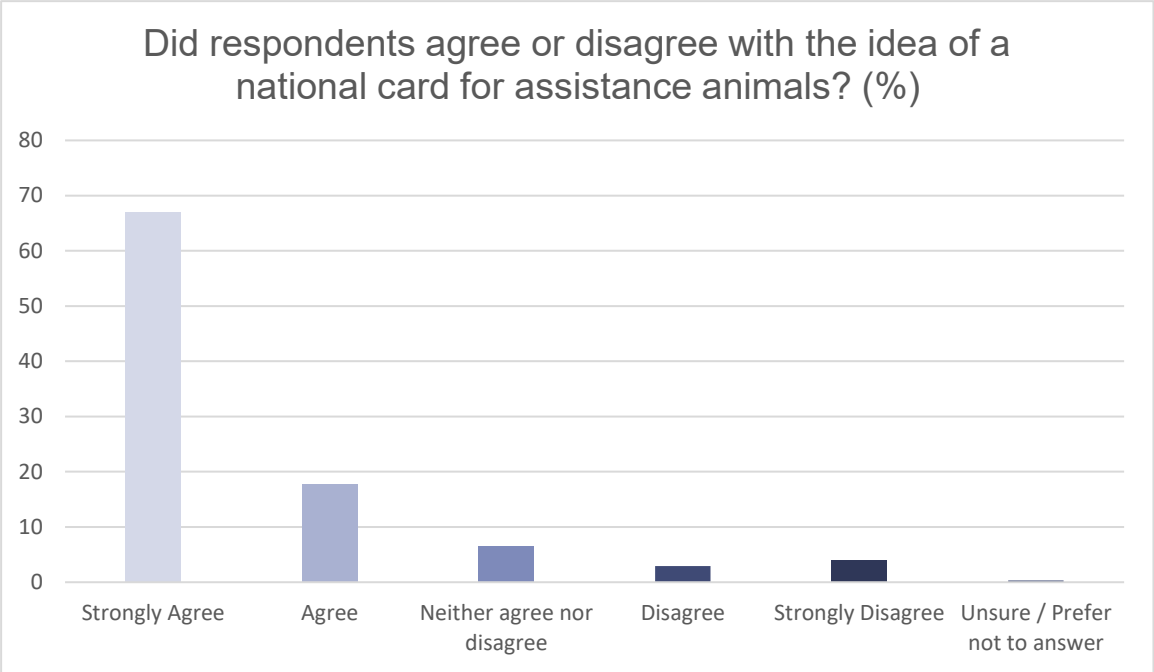

Figure 12: Respondent views on Principle 5: Ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or unsure

Draft Principle 5 is about having the same national branding and one identity card for assistance animal handlers across Australia.

Of the people who responded, 67% strongly agreed that Principle 5 is needed.

Respondents said a national identity card and consistent branding would help handlers. It would increase confidence that their right to have an assistance animal will be recognised everywhere.

Consistent branding would also make it easier for businesses to understand access rules and follow them correctly. This could help reduce confusion and concerns about “fake” assistance animals.

Respondents said that if assistance animal handlers meet the required accreditation standards, they should be able to apply for and receive a national identity card.

Important features of a national identity card

When asked what features should be included on a national identity card, respondents suggested the following:

- educational resources for businesses, including a summary of the DDA
- the date of the assistance animals’ last successful PAT

- assistance animal details, such as their name, breed, photo and date of birth
- emergency contact information
- clear logo / branding
- name and photo of the assistance animal handler
- card expiration date
- card registration number
- details for the accrediting organisation
- return details for a lost card, and
- contact details for a governing body.

Responses highlighted the need for a national identity card to be waterproof, with consistent branding and features that are difficult to copy or fake. It was proposed that the national identity card follow a similar process to drivers' licences. It was also suggested that identity cards include braille and a digital option. A digital card will promote security and allow for instant updates and card cancellations, if needed.

The Queensland Assistance Animal Card was highlighted as an example for a national card.

Concerns about a national card

Some respondents raised concerns about a national identity card.

People asked who would issue the card and who would pay for it.

Respondents were also worried that even an optional card could lead to discrimination. They said assistance animal handlers without a card might be treated unfairly.

Submissions stressed that a national identity card should not create new barriers. For example, requiring people in rural or remote areas to travel to get a card could make existing inequalities worse.

Respondents said the card system must be easy to access and fair, so it does not increase the challenges assistance animal handlers already face.

Other themes

Respondents also shared views about what should not be included on identity cards.

Privacy was a strong concern. Many respondents said details about a person's disability should never appear on an identity card.

Some respondents suggested a temporary or provisional card for assistance animals in training. This would allow animals in training to access public spaces as part of their learning.

Submissions also highlighted the importance of making identity cards available to assistance animal trainers.

Principle 6 – Animal Welfare

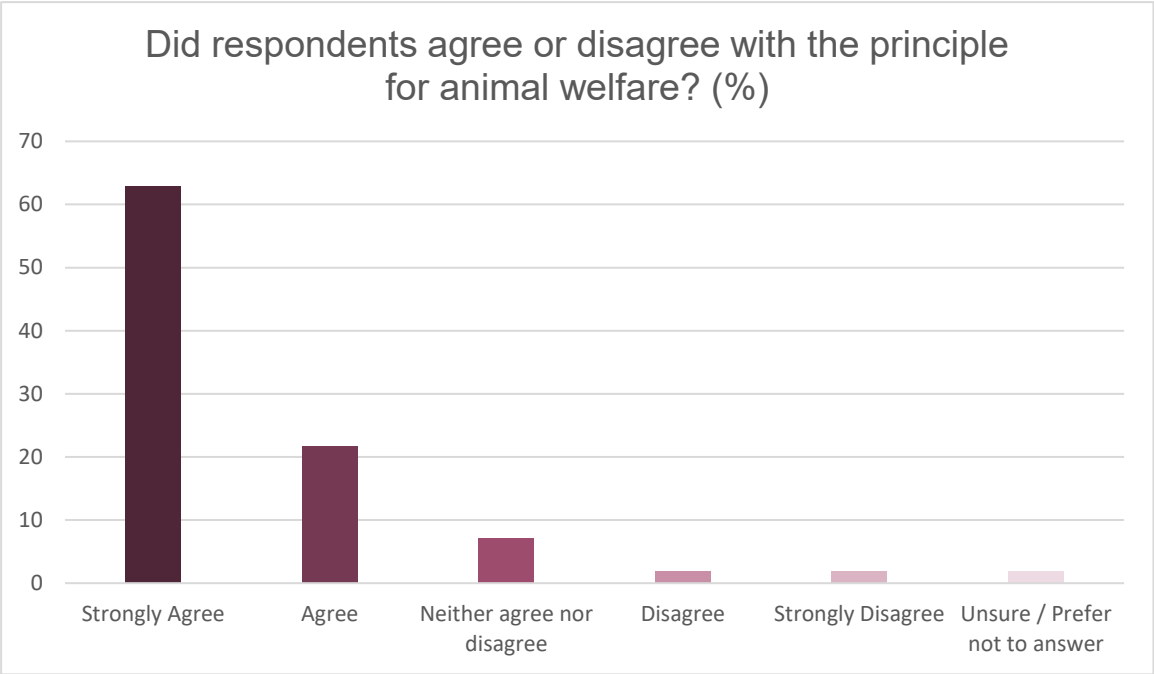

Figure 13: Respondent views on Principle 6: Ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or unsure

The principle of protecting assistance animal welfare was strongly supported.

Respondents identified several risks to assistance animals, including:

- using harmful training tools, such as choke chains
- handlers not understanding the animal's limits
- not giving animals enough rest or downtime
- placing unrealistic demands on the animal
- animals living in stressful environments
- handlers being unable to afford veterinary care
- limited education for handlers
- poor heat management in hot weather
- choosing an assistance animal that does not match the handler's needs.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of humane, reward-based training methods.

Some submissions said there should be flexibility to allow tandem teams. This includes situations where animals perform different tasks, or where a trained animal supports an animal in training.

Submissions also stressed the need for regular checks to make sure assistance animals are being well cared for. Respondents suggested this could be done through PAT reassessments.

Improving Principles 5 and 6 based on feedback

There was less confusion about draft Principles 5 and 6. Respondents generally found these Principles easy to understand.

Most submissions responded clearly to each principle, which showed that their purpose was well understood.

However, based on concerns that a national card would be 'required', Principle 5 has been slightly revised to reflect that the card should be 'recognised' nationally and will not take away existing access rights for people who do not obtain a card.

Principle 6 has also been revised to provide a clearer statement of what 'animal welfare' should mean for assistance animals. Although this was well understood by respondents, it is preferable that the principle 'speaks for itself'.

The proposed changes are:

Principle 5: Nationally recognised identity card and logo

Principle 6: Animal welfare is considered at all stages of an assistance animal's life, including during training, service, and after retirement.

Respondents raised questions about how the national identity card would work in practice. As with principle 1-4, Australian, state and territory governments will work together to agree on how these Principles should be implemented.

Additional feedback on the draft principles from respondents

Respondents also shared feedback that did not fit under the six draft principles.

Some respondents said there should be an easier way to make complaints. Suggestions included having one national body to handle complaints, or a dedicated hotline for assistance animal handlers when access problems occur. Some said this information could be included on a national identity card.

Respondents also raised concerns about some of the words used in the draft principles. Terms like "matched" and "assistance animal user" were seen as unclear or excluding. For this reason, the term "handler" has been used instead.

Many written submissions focused on how the principles would work in practice. Some people questioned whether guiding principles alone would lead to real change. Respondents said the principles need funding and clear enforcement. This could include stronger penalties for businesses or services that wrongly refuse access.

Respondents also said states and territories should have clear and transparent timeframes for implementation. They noted that each state and territory is starting from a different policy position.

Another concern was the need for a transition period before any new rules become mandatory. Respondents said this would help make sure current assistance animal handlers are supported and not excluded.

Finally, respondents noted that the principles should not remove existing rights under the DDA. However, they also noted that the DDA, including assistance animal provisions, is currently under review.

Conclusion

What these results say about the draft principles

Most respondents supported the draft principles. Many said that having the same rules across Australia would make life easier for assistance animal handlers. It would also help businesses and services better understand their access obligations.

Many of the concerns raised focused on how the principles would be put into practice. A strong theme was the need for the system to be affordable and easy to access. Respondents said that if certain standards become mandatory, everyone must be able to meet them, regardless of their income or where they live.

Respondents were concerned that without flexibility, the principles could exclude people such as those living in rural or remote areas. Submissions also stressed that the principles must align with protections under the DDA. They should not disadvantage owner-trained assistance animals or smaller training organisations. These concerns will be considered during implementation.

While there was strong support for the principles, respondents noted that the principles alone will not fix all issues faced by assistance animal handlers.

One of the strongest messages from the feedback was the need for better public education. Many respondents said misinformation and lack of understanding are major barriers to access. This shows that additional work, such as a national education campaign, will be needed alongside the principles to address these challenges.

Next Steps

The revised principles will be brought to the Disability Reform Ministerial Council for their agreement.

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing will continue to work with states and territories through the AAWG. This work will support implementation, once the principles are approved by the Disability Reform Ministerial Council. Guidance will also be developed to explain what each principle means in practice.

The principles will not be legally binding. States and territories will be responsible for putting them into action.

Each state and territory will start from a different position and will set its own timeline for implementation. Some may need to develop or change legislation or create new accreditation systems. Others may only need to review and update their existing arrangements.

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing will keep the public informed about implementation progress and timeframes.

Acknowledgements

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing would like to thank all individuals and organisations who shared feedback during the public consultation.

Health.gov.au

All information in this publication is correct as at May 2026

