



National Affiliate Handbook

Companion Card:

fair ticketing for people with disability
who require a companion





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What is the Companion Card?

The Companion Card is a wallet-sized card issued to some people with disability. The card has a photograph of the cardholder and identifies that person as someone who requires attendant care support from a companion to participate at venues/activities.

The Companion Card can be presented when booking or purchasing a ticket, only when the cardholder requires the assistance of a companion in order to access that particular venue or activity. Participating ('affiliate') organisations will recognise the Companion Card and will issue the cardholder with a second ticket for their companion at no charge.

The Companion Card promotes an existing right for people with a significant, permanent disability to participate at venues/activities in the community, without incurring an additional cost because they require a companion to provide attendant care support.

Whilst the Companion Card addresses some ticketing issues for some people with disability, the responsibility for accessibility remains with venue and activity operators.

What is industry affiliation?

Affiliates are organisations, events or activities that officially register to participate in the Companion Card program. This means they agree to:

- Issue a companion ticket at no charge to cardholders from any Australian state or territory who require a companion to provide attendant care support to participate at their venue/activity
- Display the Companion Card logo in a prominent position and/or in promotional material where possible
- Abide by the Companion Card affiliate terms and conditions outlined in this Handbook.

Who will Companion Cards be issued to?

Companion Cards will be issued to applicants who can demonstrate that:

1. They have a significant, permanent disability
2. Due to the impact of their disability they are unable to participate at most community venues or activities without attendant care support
3. Their need for this level of support will be lifelong.

Attendant care type support includes significant assistance required with mobility, communication, self-care, or learning, planning and thinking, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies do not enable the person to carry out these tasks. Card applicants must meet strict criteria as stipulated by their relevant state or territory. Each application must be signed by a medical professional and/or allied health professional who can confirm the details provided by the individual applying.

Applications are lodged with the relevant state or territory program for verification. Applicants agree to the Companion Card cardholder terms and conditions, which outline entitlements, obligations and appropriate use of the card.

The card will only be issued to people who meet **all** the criteria for the program. There may be circumstances whereby a person may require a companion but may not qualify to receive a Companion Card. For example, a person experiencing a temporary impairment; a person whose expected development or recovery may mean that they will not require a companion in the future; or a person who is affected by the specific inaccessibility of a particular venue.

It is the responsibility of the organisation to negotiate alternative methods with the individual to verify the need for attendant care for people who do not hold a Companion Card. Further information can be obtained from the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). See additional resources.



Removing barriers for people with disability

Whilst the Companion Card addresses some issues of discrimination against people with disability by enabling fairer ticketing practices, the overall responsibility for ensuring equal access to goods, service and facilities remains with venue and activity owners and operators.

Venue, activity owners and operators are already required to comply with existing disability anti-discrimination legislation, including the State and Territory Act and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (*Cwlth*), and should be familiar with these provisions.

One way of identifying and addressing barriers that prevent the equal participation of people with disability can be through the development of a Disability Action Plan.

Many government and non-government organisations have developed a Disability Action Plan and registered them with AHRC. An organisation's action plan is taken into account in the event of a complaint being lodged by a member of the public.

Where current barriers to physical access exist in venues and activities (regardless of whether the organisation affiliates with the Companion Card), these need to be addressed by all venue/activity owners and operators by implementing strategies such as the provision of ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, appropriate signage, captioning and the provision of Auslan (Australian sign language) interpreters. The development of a Disability Action Plan is an ideal way to begin to identify and resolve these issues.

More information on Disability Action Plans can be obtained from AHRC (see additional resources).

Description of Terms

'Cardholder' – refers to a person with disability, whose application for a Companion Card has been successful, and whose photograph and details appear on a Companion Card.

'Companion' – This program uses the term 'companion' to describe a paid or unpaid assistant or carer who provides attendant care type support to a cardholder, to enable them to participate in most community activities.

'Affiliate' – is used to describe organisations, businesses and outlets that charge an admission or participation fee, and have officially agreed they will accept the National Companion Card by completing the National Affiliate Application Form.

'Companion Ticket' – is a second ticket or admission issued for a companion, at no charge, when it is essential for the cardholder to receive attendant care type support in order to participate at a venue/activity.

Why has the Companion Card been developed?

The Victorian Network On Recreation and Disability (VICNORD) developed the concept of a Companion Card in response to continued concern from people with disability who found the pricing policies of many entertainment, leisure and recreation venues/activities to be discriminatory. The scheme has been adopted by other states and territories based upon the Victorian model.

People with disability, who are unable to attend community venues and activities without attendant care support, have a right to equal participation in the community. **This fundamental right is protected under section 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth). This Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person who requires the assistance of a companion.**

People with disability who need attendant care type support from a companion in order to participate at most venues/activities in the community are sometimes required to pay two admissions and/or booking fees; one for themselves and one for their companion.

This practice is discriminatory because it has the effect of increasing the admission and/or booking price for the person with disability.

The Companion Card provides venue organisations with a simple and consistent method of identifying who may legitimately require a companion.

The Companion Card has been developed to promote the existing right of people with disability to fair ticketing. It is not a new responsibility; nor is it a discount scheme, concession or benefit. It is intended to be a tool to assist the business and community sectors to identify people who require attendant care support from a companion.

The program has been developed with the input and support of a number of businesses and industry peak-bodies.

The Companion Card is a not for profit program.



How to affiliate

1. Complete the National Affiliate Application Form. You can email your questions or requests to **companioncard@fahcsia.gov.au**
2. Return the form to postal address
National Companion Card Affiliate Applications
Disability and Carers Programs Branch
Box 7576,
Canberra Mail Centre, ACT 2610
3. Additional copies of the National Affiliate Handbook and National Affiliate Application Form can be obtained by emailing **companioncard@fahcsia.gov.au** or by downloading a copy from the National Companion Card website **www.companioncard.gov.au**

Tips to help you complete the National Affiliate Application Form

Space has been provided on the National Affiliate Application Form to describe the range of services provided by the affiliating organisation and/or to list their specific services. It is recommended that you specifically list high profile services or venues that are not easy to identify as a part of your organisation. Any service or venue listed on your National Affiliate Application Form will be recorded in the National Companion Card affiliate database.

It is not necessary for organisations with multiple outlets or locations that trade under the same name (e.g. a chain of cinemas), to list every location on the National Affiliate Application Form.



Promotional materials

Once you have sent in your National Affiliate Application Form arrangements will be made for you to be sent an affiliate kit. This includes a range of promotional materials to assist your organisation to implement and communicate your acceptance of the Companion Card, such as:

- 'Companion Card Accepted Here' stickers
- Brochures and counter stands
- Posters in a range of sizes
- A security features flyer which outlines how you can validate card authenticity when sighting the card or taking phone bookings
- Access to electronic logos.



Where possible, affiliates are requested to display the Companion Card promotional materials and logo in a prominent position at ticketing outlets or business premises and/or on promotional material.

Tips to help you implement and communicate your organisation's acceptance of the Companion Card

- Create a link from your organisation's website to the National Companion Card website, to provide information about the program to your customers **www.companioncard.gov.au**.
- Display the Companion Card promotional material in a prominent position at your venue/events. For example, display the 'Companion Card Accepted Here' sticker at entrances and ticket windows.
- Include your organisation's acceptance of the Companion Card in relevant communication. For example, provide ticketing information on print material and websites.
- Incorporate your acceptance of the Companion Card into your organisation's policies and procedures. For example, include the requirement to accept Companion Cards in your contracts with ticketing agents and incorporate acceptance of the card into staff training.
- Develop a policy regarding how your organisation will respond to requests for a companion ticket for individuals that do not hold a Companion Card. Note: the Companion Card will only be issued to people who meet all the criteria for the program. There may be circumstances whereby a person does not qualify to receive a Companion Card.

How much does it cost to affiliate?

Affiliate with the Companion Card program is free. Administration of the National Affiliate Program is funded by the Commonwealth.

Why should organisations affiliate?

Some of the benefits of affiliation are:

- Affiliation will present a positive public image for your organisation.
- You will be meeting your social responsibility by incorporating the human rights of people with disability into your ticketing policies and practices.
- You will have access to a target market of people with disability deciding to pay for your services due to your acceptance of the Companion Card.
- The Companion Card, if adopted by a venue/activity, provides evidence that the organisation has taken some initial steps to remove discriminatory policies or practices. (Note: organisations should seek to ensure they demonstrate this by implementing a range of policies to ensure accessibility of their venues).

Who should affiliate?

If you charge an admission or participation fee for your service, you should consider affiliating with the Companion Card program.

It may be beneficial for organisations to affiliate with the Companion Card even if they are not directly involved in issuing tickets or monitoring admissions. For example, a venue owner may affiliate with the program and make it a condition of venue use that all service providers operating from the venue comply with Companion Card affiliate terms and conditions.

Similarly, a funding body may affiliate and make it a condition of funding that all grant recipients comply with Companion Card affiliate terms and conditions.



Protecting affiliates

The potential for misuse of the Companion Card has been minimised by a robust application process that ensures the Companion Card reaches its intended target group.

Some features of this process include:

1. All applicants must have a relevant medical professional and/or allied health professional sign their application form to declare that the information on the application form is correct.
2. All applications are verified.
3. Companion Cards are printed with an expiry date on the bottom right hand corner. After this period all cardholders will need to renew their card. The renewal period is based on:
 - The physical life expectancy (wear and tear) of the card
 - The requirement for photographs to remain reflective of the cardholder's appearance
 - The potential for change in the support requirements for some cardholders.

The Companion Card incorporates the same polymer technology that is used to produce Australia's 'plastic' banknotes. This makes the card virtually impossible to accurately reproduce.

The Companion Card program was the first in Australia to utilise this technology to provide advanced forgery protection for a card that is intended for public circulation.

The card has been designed with a number of other security features. Affiliates will be able to use these to verify cardholder information when taking telephone bookings and distributing tickets. Organisations can choose if or how they wish to incorporate these security features into their ticketing policies and practices.

Full details of these features will be provided to organisations when they affiliate.

Issues resolution

It is recommended that affiliates develop their own complaints procedure to deal with issues relating to the Companion Card. If appropriate, the organisation's existing complaints handling procedure may be applied.

Cardholders who have a complaint about the recognition of their Companion Card at a venue/activity are directed to attempt to resolve the issue with the venue/activity management in the first instance.

If an affiliate has a complaint regarding alleged misuse of a Companion Card, they should note the card details, if possible, and lodge the complaint directly with the relevant state or territory Companion Card program.

National Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions

1. Affiliates understand that the Companion Card will only be used when the cardholder requires the assistance of a companion to participate at a particular venue/activity.
2. The minimum expectation of National Companion Card affiliates is that they will issue cardholders from any Australian state or territory with one companion ticket, or admission, at no charge. This ticket will be exempt from all booking fees.
3. Where a cardholder needs more than one companion to provide the attendant care support, the cardholder will negotiate this with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.
4. The Companion Card can be used to obtain a companion ticket for any programs, services and sessions run by affiliated venue/activity operators. This will be subject to the usual admission availability and conditions.
5. Booking and ticket distribution practices for companion tickets should not be more difficult than the standard ticketing practices of the affiliated venue/activity.
6. The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards.
7. The venue/activity must ensure cardholders are able to be seated or located physically close to their companions. Companions will remain close to cardholders to assist them as required. Cardholders with specific seating requirements will inform the venue/activity at the time of booking.
8. Some venue/activity operators may charge for participation over and above general admission costs (e.g. a fee for rides in addition to an entry fee at a fun park). Affiliated venue/activity operators must issue a companion ticket for both admission, and for additional components such as rides, if the cardholder requires assistance in order to participate.
9. Companion Cards may be used to purchase a package deal for the cardholder that combines admission costs with ancillary components such as meals. When taking a booking for a package deal, affiliates should provide details of what is included with the companion ticket. It is essential that the companion's support to the cardholder is not disrupted if the ancillary components are not included in the companion ticket. For example, if meals are not included, the companion must be able to bring or access food in a manner that enables them to provide continual support to the cardholder.

10. Affiliated venues/activities agree to, where possible, display the Companion Card logo in a prominent position at their business premises or ticketing outlet, and in promotional material.
11. Only the person whose photograph and details appear on the Companion Card can use the card.
12. Companion tickets cannot be used without the Companion Card cardholder being present.
13. Companion Card cardholders must inform the venue/activity of their requirement for a companion ticket at the time they book or purchase their own ticket.
14. Acceptance of the Companion Card does not indicate that the venue/activity is accessible. Cardholders will be advised to check accessibility with the venue/activity before booking tickets.
15. Cardholders must provide their Companion Card details when making telephone bookings, and must present their valid card during ticket collection and at any time when asked during the activity. If cardholders cannot present their card, they may be charged for the companion ticket.
16. If a venue/activity suspects a Companion Card is being misused, they can report this to the Companion Card program in their relevant state or territory, which will investigate the report. Proven misuse of the Companion Card may result in card cancellation, and the cardholder being ineligible to reapply.
17. It is understood that venue/activity operators and organisations agree to and accept the National Companion Card affiliate terms and conditions when they submit the National Affiliate Application Form.



Getting more information about the Companion Card

The National Companion Card website

www.companioncard.gov.au

This website provides a range of information about the National Companion Card program and links to other state and territory websites.

Additional copies

Further information and additional copies of this Handbook and the National Affiliate Application Form can be obtained by emailing

companioncard@fahcsia.gov.au

or by downloading a copy from the National Companion Card website.

Additional resources

Disability discrimination is unlawful under various state and territory laws. The following resources may be useful if you are unsure of what may or may not be considered discriminatory, or you require other information regarding disabilities or industry policy and practices.

Australian Human Rights Commission

Human Rights education is one of the core responsibilities of AHRC along with the investigation and attempted resolution of complaints about breaches of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation.

Telephone: (02) 9284 9600

Website: www.humanrights.gov.au

General enquiries and publications:
1300 369 711

TTY: 1800 620 241

Facsimile: (02) 9284 9611

Complaints infoline: 1300 656 419 or
complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

Industry Peak Bodies

The peak or governing body for your industry may be able to provide support or advice including information on how to access further training for working with people with disability.



Accepted Here