Department of Psychology and Counselling

School of Psychology and Public Health

# Final report to National Disability Insurance Agency

7 August 2019

| **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant-trained assistance dogs**Literature review, trainer interviews, and recommended good practice guidelines |
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## What is this report?

This report has been prepared at the request of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). First, it provides a literature review investigating whether certain dog traits can predict successful qualification as a working dog, in order to aid selection of puppies for assistance dog training. Second, it contains the results of interviews with people working as dog trainers with professional assistance from dog providers, or who have trained their own assistance dog, to obtain more in-depth information about whether owner-trained assistance dogs are feasible, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of owner-trained versus provider-trained dogs. Finally, it synthesises the findings of the literature review and interviews into recommended good practice guidelines for owner-trained assistance dogs, where possible. This report should ideally be read in conjunction with a companion report titled ‘Key terms for animals in disability assistance roles’, which provides definitions for common terms used in assistance and therapy animal contexts. Taken together, this information will be useful for the NDIA when determining whether to provide funding support for a National Disability Insurance Scheme participant who wants to train their own assistance dog.

### Contributors

La Trobe University is an Australian public institute founded in 1964. The university currently has over 36,000 students and is rated among the top three universities in Victoria, and the top ten in Australia.

### Authors

Dr Tiffani Howell was responsible for the literature review about predictors of success for assistance dogs, and developing the good practice guidelines for owner-trained assistance dogs. She completed her PhD at Monash University in 2013 and is a Research Fellow in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University. She has extensive experience in research on animal welfare, dog-owner relationships, and dog behaviour, including conducting surveys, focus groups, and behavioural studies.

Dr Lynna Feng was responsible for conducting interviews with individuals who have experience in assistance dog training, and for developing the good practice guidelines with Dr Howell. She also assisted with the literature review. Lynna completed her PhD in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University in 2018, focusing on whether clicker training is a more effective training method than other types of positive reinforcement techniques (for example; food rewards), in applied settings.

Prof Pauleen Bennett acted as mentor to Drs Howell and Feng, providing advice on information sources and report drafts. She is Head of the Department of Psychology and Counselling in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University, and is Australia’s leading expert in Anthrozoology – the study of human-animal relationships. At La Trobe University, she directs a multidisciplinary research group called the Anthrozoology Research Group, which focuses on understanding the use of dogs in medical and other applied settings.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Ms Deanna Tepper for providing research assistance in compiling an earlier report that informed the current work.

### Abbreviations

| **Abbreviation** | **Phrase** |
| --- | --- |
| AAI | Animal-assisted intervention |
| AD | Assistance dog |
| ADI | Assistance Dogs International |
| ASD | Autism spectrum disorder |
| LIMA | Least-intrusive, minimally aversive |
| NDIA | National Disability Insurance Agency |
| NDIS | National Disability Insurance Scheme |
| PAT | Public access test |
| PTSD | Post-traumatic stress disorder |
| QLD | Queensland |

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## Executive summary

Assistance animals are animals which live with and work for a person with disability; they have been specially trained to help mitigate the impact of their owner’s disability. In 2016, researchers at La Trobe University (LTU) were commissioned by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to review whether assistance animals could be effective in mitigating the impacts of their handler’s disability. As part of the recommendations provided to the NDIA, the research team recommended that NDIS participants who are interested in training their own assistance dog (AD) should be assisted to do so, when feasible.

While participant-trained ADs are a good idea in principle, in practice several issues must be resolved in order to ensure that a dog can successfully become an AD for a person with disability. Selecting the wrong dog for assistance work, or training it incorrectly or insufficiently, would be a waste of resources for the person with disability and the NDIA. Inadequate assessment of the dog as a disability support could mean that the dog does not perform its duties properly, or that it misbehaves in public; these outcomes are not acceptable.

The aim of this report is to assist with development of policies and procedures for participant-trained ADs that are based on current good practice, to optimise positive outcomes for all parties. To do so, the research team at LTU conducted a literature review on the selection and training of ADs to understand the successes and challenges in current practice. We also interviewed individuals who had experience training or using an AD. These interviews identified aspects of owner-trained AD selection and training that could be challenging and controversial. Based on the information gathered from the literature review and interviews, we were unable to develop good practice recommendations for NDIS participants interested in applying for NDIS funding to train their own AD.

We reviewed scientific literature relating to the success of not only ADs but also other working dog cohorts (for example; police and military working dogs). The review identified that:

* Predictors of success in working dogs, including ADs, are limited, especially in terms of reliability at a young age.
* Failure rates for dogs in AD programs range from 24% to 49%, even in dogs which are typically purpose-bred for assistance work and trained by individuals with extensive experience in AD training. Failure rates for other types of working dogs (for example; military, detection), can reach as high as 75%.
* Individuals generally either need to spend a lot of time with an individual dog or be an expert in dog behaviour in order to more reliably predict whether a dog has the appropriate traits to succeed in AD training.
* AD success is impacted by the dog’s early life experiences: puppies receiving extra socialisation have more positive behavioural outcomes later on than puppies receiving normal socialisation.

At present, there is no evidence to suggest how well the results of studies on organisation-bred and -trained ADs apply to individuals acquiring and training their own dogs. To understand this process, twelve individuals were interviewed about their thoughts and perceptions on owner-trained ADs. These individuals worked for an AD provider organisation, had trained their own AD, and/or provided assistance to people who wanted to train their own AD. The types of disability support trained for included mobility, psychiatric/developmental, medical alert (for example; seizure, diabetes), and hearing alert. The interview results suggested that:

* It is possible for an individual to train their own AD.
* Perceived advantages include a stronger dog-owner bond, and the development of useful training skills by the owner, which can lead to a sense of empowerment.
* Perceived disadvantages include the time-consuming nature of the training process, and a total lack of industry regulation.
* Owner-trained dogs are perceived to experience less public acceptance compared to those obtained from an AD provider organisation.

Based on the information gathered from the literature review and interviews, we were unable to generate recommendations for NDIS participant-trained AD good practice. Too little is known about AD selection and training to provide recommendations that will reliably result in a successful working AD. We recognise the potential advantages of participant-trained ADs in principle, and therefore recommend that any future guidelines developed be based on scientific evidence, and cover the following considerations:

* The level of mentorship required by any participant who is interested in training their own AD.
	+ Before guidelines of this kind can be developed, it will be necessary to define who would qualify as a mentor (for example; level and type of formal education, on the job experience, certification by a relevant professional body), and how that mentor would establish whether the participant has the skills and capabilities necessary to undertake the training process with their assistance. Currently, both are unclear, and research is needed to understand which formal and informal qualifications are necessary to perform this role.
* How to appropriately select a dog for this work
	+ Based on the current state of the science for AD selection, there is no trait or suite of traits (physical, temperament, or otherwise) which reliably determine which dogs will successfully qualify as ADs. Furthermore, there is no age at which subsequently successful dogs can be correctly identified. More research is needed to strengthen the evidence base; a meta-analysis of previous studies may improve statistical power, providing insights that are currently unavailable.
* How to appropriately train a dog for this work
	+ There is surprisingly little research focused on whether different training practices are more or less successful in producing qualified ADs; we recommend that this is urgently needed.
* Who should certify dog-owner teams, giving them the right to public access
	+ This relates to the first point about a lack of qualifications required in the AD space generally. It will be necessary to develop policies around the qualifications needed for determining whether a dog-owner team can work together sufficiently that the dog mitigates the impact of the owner’s disability, and that the dog’s behaviour is appropriate to access public spaces.
* How often recertification is required
	+ Some organisations require an annual recertification process to maintain public access. Should this be made a requirement for all ADs, even if owner-trained? If so, who will facilitate and pay for this process, and how will it be done?
* AD welfare needs
	+ AD welfare must be a top priority, so we recommend regular contact with a veterinarian to ensure that the health and welfare needs of the AD are being met, through the life of the animal. We also recommend that guidelines be developed around what an AD can reasonably be required to do in terms of expected work hours, time for rest, recreation and exercise needs, the length of the dog’s working life, and so forth.

Once a dog has passed the public access test and is working in a disability support role for their owner, we recommend that the NDIA consider providing funding support for the AD’s maintenance if the NDIS delegate determines that the AD represents a reasonable and necessary support for that individual participant, per current NDIS guidelines. Moving forward, to ensure that all ADs working in Australia (and funded by the NDIS) are high quality, we strongly advocate for the development of a national, independent accrediting body for ADs, regardless of whether they are provider-trained or owner-trained. We also strongly advocate for the development of a similar accrediting body for trainers and mentors, and more research to understand the extent to which the presence of a pet dog in the home could, for some people with disability, confer similar benefits to an AD.

## Introduction

According to the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), assistance animals are defined as animals which have been specially trained to help a person with disability mitigate the impacts of that disability, and which have behaviour appropriate to access public spaces (please see the companion report, ‘Key terms for animals in disability assistance roles’, for more information on the functional definition of the AD for NDIS purposes). In 2016, a team of researchers at La Trobe University reviewed the effectiveness of assistance animals as a disability support [1]. The review, which was commissioned by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), found that assistance dogs (ADs) in particular can be an important support, but existing research was marred with limitations (for example; small sample sizes, lack of sufficient controls) that made it difficult to generalise the results to the wider population of individuals with disability. In response, the NDIA agreed to support funding for ADs on a case-by-case basis, as part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). There are currently no national regulations for AD selection (for example; breed, age, source), training (for example; amount, type, who is qualified to conduct the training), or certification (for example; who should certify the AD, how often, and with what measures).

Some NDIS participants have expressed interest in training their own AD. This is an attractive proposition in principle because, if done correctly, it could save money for the NDIA compared to funding a dog through an AD provider organisation; it could also provide a sense of empowerment to the participant. ADs can cost provider organisations over $30,000 to select, house, train, and place [2, 3]; a participant-trained animal could lower these costs considerably, as the costs of housing and training the animal could be borne by the participant.

In practice, several issues must be resolved to ensure appropriate dog selection, training, and assessment. Selecting the wrong dog for this sort of work, or training it incorrectly, could result in a waste of resources for the participant and the NDIA. Inadequate assessment could mean that the dog does not perform its duties properly, or that it misbehaves in public; both are unacceptable outcomes for an AD. Owner-trained AD selection and training will require some sort of oversight, or at least the development of standards, to ensure that any dog selected and trained by NDIS participants will become a well-trained, qualified AD that meets the same standards required by established provider organisations.

To best resolve these issues, it is important to better understand current AD provider practices, to determine whether they can realistically be applied to individual participants. For example, the selection processes (for example; temperament tests) and training practices used by AD provider organisations to ensure that their dogs are suitable for assistance work, are not always clear. If standard techniques were made available to the NDIA, they could potentially be applied to NDIS participants who intend to select and train their own AD. Furthermore, information about the failure rates of dogs going through the provider organisations, needs clarification. This will assist the NDIA in deciding whether or not the risks inherent in attempting to train one’s own AD justify the potential benefits. It is necessary to develop policies and procedures for participant-trained ADs that are based on current good practice, to optimise positive outcomes for all parties.

The aim of this project was to describe good practice in AD selection and training, in order to increase the likelihood that any dog selected for assistance work will ultimately be an effective AD. To accomplish this aim, we first systematically reviewed the existing scientific literature on AD selection and training. We then interviewed people with experience in training ADs, including individuals who trained their own AD and trainers working for provider organisations. This enabled us to better understand training and assessment practices, as well as to identify the potential advantages and disadvantages of owner- versus provider-trained ADs. Finally, on the basis of those results, we developed guidelines for good practice in AD selection and training, where possible.

## Literature review: do certain traits predict success?

### Method

We undertook a systematic literature review to find academic research related to AD selection and training, based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines [4]. Because we anticipated that there would be a relative lack of scientific publications specifically focusing on ADs, we expanded our search to include all types of working dogs (for example; military, police, scent detection). Using the Google Scholar and Web of Science databases, we employed the search terms presented in [Table 1](#_Table_1_Search).

#### Table 1 Search terms utilised

Search terms utilised in the literature review examining assistance dog selection and training

| **Search terms utilised** |
| --- |
| assistance dog self-train\* |
| service dog self-train\* |
| working dog self-train\* |
| assistance dog owner train\* |
| service dog owner train\* |
| working dog owner train\* |
| assistance dog professional train\* |
| service dog professional train\* |
| working dog professional train\* |
| assistance dog selection |
| service dog selection |
| working dog selection |
| assistance dog temperament |
| service dog temperament |
| working dog temperament |
| assistance dog predict\* |
| service dog predict\* |
| working dog predict\* |

\*search results should include all possible suffixes (for example; train, trainer, training, trained)

Google Scholar typically returns hundreds or even thousands of results; therefore, we inspected results only from the first three pages (for example; the first 30 results, at 10 results per page), because the relevance of the publication titles dropped after page three. All results from the Web of Science database for each search term were included.

### Results

In total, we found 38 sources that appeared relevant for our topic, based on the title of the work. Upon reading the article texts, we excluded seven papers. We found three additional papers that were cited in an original source and deemed highly relevant for this review [5-7]; furthermore, one PhD thesis was found through a Google Scholar email alert after the original search was completed [8]. Therefore, we included 35 scientific works in the review, including 33 peer-reviewed journal articles [5, 6, 9-38], one PhD thesis [8], and one Master’s thesis [7]. Nearly all of the studies included focused on selection, reporting on the predictive value of puppy traits for successful qualification as a working dog. Very few focused on the effects of training styles or other external factors.

Of the 35 scientific publications included in the review, three articles were reviews [12, 16, 38], one of which was a systematic review [12]. Another article represented a ‘big data’ retrospective analysis of more than 7,000 dogs [14]. Nineteen used behavioural tests [5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 19-21, 24-26, 29, 32-37], seven employed questionnaire methods [9, 15, 17, 22, 23, 27, 28], three used a combination of behavioural tests and questionnaires [7, 18, 31], and two used behavioural and physiological tests [11, 30]. Approximately half (n = 19) of the articles focused solely on assistance dogs [9-11, 13-15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30-33], with 12 of those researching dog guides [9-11, 13, 14, 20, 22, 23, 28, 30]. Another six articles included working dogs in general [12, 16, 34-37], seven included military or police dogs [5-7, 18, 19, 24, 34], one included pet dogs [29], and three included shelter dogs [25, 32, 33]. While we did not originally intend to include studies focusing on pet or shelter dogs, we included these particular studies because: the pet dog study [29] explored predictive validity of personality traits on a working dog trial; one shelter dog study [25] examined whether a temperament test could predict successful qualification and work as a therapy dog (a dog that is part of a structured, goal-oriented therapeutic intervention, and which does not typically live with the person for whom the intervention is being run [39]; and the other two [32, 33] explored whether a temperament test could be used to select shelter dogs for assistance work. Since these studies had the potential to inform working dog outcomes, they were retained.

#### Predictive validity of puppy tests

The included studies usually focused on predictive validity of puppy tests, and failure rates were often reported as part of these reports. A summary of the results from the scientific reports focusing on predictive validity in ADs, and shelter dogs considered for assistance work, are presented in [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary)

#### Table 2: Summary of results for predictive validity in assistance dog success

| **Author, year [citation]** | **Assistance type** | **Number of dogs** | **Number of humans** | **Age of testing** | **Type of test** | **Predictors of success** | **Predictive value** | **Fail % (for behaviour)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Arata et al, 2010 [9] | Guide | 144  | 36 trainers  | 15 months | Survey | Low distraction, aggression, animal interest, food interest, scent interest, and suspicion. High docility, sensitivity, and initiative. | Distraction: ~80%Docility: 62%Sensitivity: 64% | 46% |
| Asher et al, 2013 [10] | Guide | 465  | 3 assessors | 6-8 weeks | Behaviour | Moderate responses for: retrieving a toy, response to being stroked and when stroking stops, returning to assessor after toy being dragged across the floor is put away, and movement over a ramp. Dogs bred in-house were more successful. | Model successfully identified 14 dogs out of 465 who did not qualify (plus 1 dog that should not have qualified according to the model, but did). | 36% |
| Batt et al, 2008\*[11] | Guide | 43  | Unclear | 6 months14 months20 months | Behaviour and Physiological | 6 months: shorter latency to drop, longer latency to rest in passive test; occurrence of jumping in dog distraction test. 14 months: higher laterality index (stronger handedness), lower use of both paws in a Kong Test, and lack of pulling on lead. 20 months: rate of both paw use in Kong Test and dog's colour, shorter latency to drop, longer latency to rest, and absence of jumping. | For predictive variables at different age groups, when combined6 months: 27%14 months: 100%20 months: 32% | 49% |
| Bray et al, 2017 [13] | Guide | 133  | 5 assessors – 2 per test | Up to 3 weeks14-17 months | Behaviour |  0-3 weeks: lower levels of maternal behaviour (for example; maternal vigilance, close proximity to litter, regular interaction with puppies) = increased success.14-17 months: less perseveration and quicker to solve the problem in problem-solving task, being quiet when exposed to a novel object, staying longer with puppy raisers. | Maternal behaviour: 2.6-foldProblem-solving task: 1.6-foldEach month longer with raiser: 57% increase in success likelihood. | 33% |
| Caron-Lourmier et al, 2016 [14] | Guide | 7,770  | Unclear | n/a - retrospective | Retrospective data analysis | Dogs withdrawn due to: environmental anxiety (321 dogs), willingness to work (311 dogs), fear/aggression (226 dogs).  | n/a | 17% withdrawn post-qualification |
| Dalibard, 2009 [15] | Assistance | 71 (?) | 71 owners | n/a - retrospective | Survey | Owner problems singing, coughing, or speaking loudly was correlated with reduced service quality. | n/a | n/a –operational dogs |
| Duffy and Serpell, 2012 [17] | Assistance  | 7,696  | Unclear – probably 1 puppy raiser per dog | 6 months12 months | Survey | At both ages, significant differences observed between successful and released dogs on 27 of the 36 CBARQ items. The most predictive trait was pulling hard on lead. | At both ages, pulling hard on lead: 1.4-fold increase in release from program. | 47% |
| Goddard and Beilharz, 1986\* [20] | Guide | 102  | Unclear | Weekly from 4-12 weeks4 months6 months12 months | Behaviour | Individual variables not typically predictive of adult performance, although response to a party whistle (8w), handling activity and fetch (9w), adult dog and surfboard (10w), and a fear on walks score at 12 weeks, were combined into a composite score called ‘puppy index’, which correlated with general fearfulness at r = 0.57. | 6 months – 57% of variance in fearfulness explained by puppy index + fear of walks at 4 and 6 months.12 months: 77% of variance explained by puppy index + fear of walks at 4, 6, and 12 months. | prediction was for adult behaviour, not qualification  |
| Harvey et al, 2016 [21] | Guide | 276 (5 months) 214 (8 months) 226 (12 months) | Unclear – probably 1 puppy raiser per dog  | 5 months8 months12 months | Survey | Older puppy raisers = less excitability and distractibility, more trainability. More children in household = increased excitability, energy level, distractibility. Previous experience with puppy raising = reduced energy level and distractibility. Separation behaviours and distractibility decreased if dog left alone for 1-2 hours instead of 0-1 hours. | 12 months: rearing environment explained 9% of variance in energy level, 4% of variance in distractibility, 3% of variance in excitability and trainability,2% of variance in separation-related behaviour. | prediction was for adult behaviour, not qualification  |
| Harvey et al, 2016 [23] | Guide | 69 | 3 testers | 5 months 8 months | Behaviour | 5 months: playing with a tea towel, not barking, no lip-licking, body shakes, shorter time oriented toward food, and down performance.8 months: not displaying a low greeting posture, low distraction, low fear/anxiety, low reactivity, shorter time oriented toward food. | 5 months: 1.7-fold.8 months: 1.7-fold | 24% |
| Harvey et al, 2017 [22] | Guide | 1,401  | 54 trainers | 5 months 8 months | Survey | 5 months: high trainability, low general anxiety, low excitability, low distractibility, and high adaptability predicted qualification.8 months: high trainability 12 months: high trainability, low general anxiety, low excitability, and low distractibility | 8.4% | 32% |
| Petry et al, 2015 [27] | Diabetes alert | 135 (?) | 135 owners | n/a - retrospective | Survey | Professionally (pro) trained dogs alerted more at night than dogs that learned on their own. Pro trained dogs perceived to alert correctly more often than others.Pro and owner-trained dogs did not differ on adverse events (for example; hospitalisations), but dogs that learned on their own significantly lower. More owners of pro or family trained dogs felt that their dog had saved a life than dogs that learned on their own. | n/a | n/a –operational dogs |
| Serpell and Hsu, 2001 [28] | Guide  | 1067  | Unclear – probably 1 puppy raiser per dog  | 12 months | Survey | Subscales of the survey were related to reasons for rejection, for example; suspicious of people (reason) correlated with stranger fear and stranger aggression (subscales); lack of confidence with stranger fear and non-social fear. | n/a | 30% |
| Tomkins et al, 2011\* [30] | Guide | 113  | Unclear | 13-17 months | Behaviour and Physiological  | Success not associated with sex, breed, or age of dog. Shorter latency to sit in third noise test, lack of panting in dog distraction test, lack of licking.Daytime activity levels and salivary IgA not predictive.Kennel surveillance: time spent resting during the evening associated with success. | Sitting within one second of the test = 65% chance of success.Lack of panting in dog distraction test = 82% chance of success;No licks = 82% success; Every minute spent resting in kennel = 3.2-fold increase in success. | 38% |
| Vaterlaws-Whiteside and Hartmann, 2017 [31] | Assistance | 33 | Behaviour test: 1 Survey: Unclear – probably 1 puppy raiser per dog | Behaviour test: 6 weeksSurvey: 8 months | Behaviour and Survey | Puppies receiving extra socialisation had significantly better scores on puppy test. For survey: puppies with extra socialisation had significantly more desirable scores on separation related behaviour, general anxiety, body sensitivity, and distraction. | n/a | Prediction was for future behaviour, not qualification |
| Weiss, 2002 [33] | Assistance (from shelters) | 75 | 4 testers and 2 trainers | 6 months to 2 years | Behaviour  | Trainer assessment of potential for service work and completion of retrieval training was r = 0.495.  | 6 items account for 36% of the variance (body sensitivity, general trainer opinion, reaction to other dog, reaction to stranger, response to stare, and jumping on people). | Prediction was for behaviour, rather than qualification |
| Weiss and Greenberg, 1997 [32] | Assistance (from shelters) | 9 | Unclear | 10 months to 2 years | Behaviour | Comparing selection phase with evaluation phase showed few correlations on task performance or negative behaviours, indicating that the test is not a good predictor of performance outcomes. | n/a – general statement about poor predictive value. | Prediction was for behaviour, rather than qualification |

Where ‘assistance type’ is reported as ‘assistance’, the article included more than one type of assistance work, or the type was unspecified.

Studies marked with an \* were conducted in Australia.

It is clear from [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary) that there are several possible predictors of success for qualification as an assistance dog, or at least desirable adult dog characteristics, but that none, if any, are strongly predictive. The possible predictors can be separated into behaviours, temperament traits, and environmental factors. According to Ley and Bennett [40], an animal’s behaviour is how it responds to a stimulus in a given moment, and it can change depending on various internal and external factors. Therefore, a behavioural response to the same stimulus might be different on two different occasions (for example; a dog might chase a tennis ball one day and not chase it the next day). Temperament, on the other hand, is a more generalised behavioural style that is relatively stable over time and is not context-dependent [40]. It is often present from birth, and is functionally indistinct from personality, although personality is conceptualised as reflecting the interaction of temperament and life experience [40]. An example of dog temperament may be ‘excitability’, as measured by the dog’s overtly enthusiastic behavioural reaction to various stimuli over a period of time.

In some cases, specific behaviours which may represent desirable temperament traits are measured, and in other cases, assessors use behavioural tests to obtain an overall idea of a dog’s temperament by observing and combining several individual behavioural responses. Therefore, some results visible in [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary) reflect behaviours such as ‘shorter latency to drop’ [11], while others present more general temperament traits, such as ‘distraction’ and ‘animal interest’ [9]. Because several individual behaviours can reflect the same temperament trait, there is a wider variety of behaviours listed than temperament traits. For instance, a few of the behaviours that may predict successful qualification as an AD are: retrieving a toy, response to being stroked, shorter latency to drop, occurrence of jumping, lack of pulling on a lead, longer latency to test, not barking, and not licking lips. The studies often combined relevant behaviours into a composite variable that had more predictive validity than the individual behaviours; therefore, the suite of behaviours was more useful than individual ones. Indeed, with two exceptions [17, 30], the studies measuring behaviour did not find much predictive value in individual behaviours. One exception to this general trend was observed in a study of 113 dog guide trainees, which found that sitting within one second of one test’s commencement, lack of panting in another test, no licking, and increased duration of resting in the kennel, each had an individual predictive value [30]. The other study that provided an exception to the general trend found that, based on a puppy raiser survey, pulling hard on the lead accounted for a 1.4-fold increase in failure among nearly 8,000 ADs in training [17].

Since most of the behavioural studies had to combine individual behaviours into a composite score in order to show any predictive validity, it makes sense that many other studies focused on temperament traits, which were often determined by observing a series of different behaviours. One study found that dogs which had previously qualified for dog guide work were subsequently withdrawn due to environmental anxiety, lack of willingness to work, and fear/aggression [14]. Indeed, fear/anxiety and aggression appear to be two important predictors of failure in trainee ADs, based on the results of several other studies [9, 22, 28]. Other factors observed to be important across studies were distractibility [9, 21, 22, 28], trainability [21, 22], suspicion of humans [9, 28], and excitability [21, 22, 28].

The disadvantage of measuring temperament traits is that they are more difficult to measure accurately than are individual behaviours. For example, failure to drop within one second of a command to drop can be measured easily, but does the temperament trait ‘aggressive’ mean that the dog has snarled at someone once, or bitten someone several times? If temperament traits are to have any utility in predicting successful qualification or to create standards for selection, they must be clearly defined and operationalised in a way that makes it possible to measure them objectively.

In addition to behavioural responses and temperament traits, some studies examined the predictive value of external factors, such as early environment, on AD qualification and/or desirable temperament trait outcomes. For instance, one study explored the impacts of a socialisation program provided in addition to the usual socialisation received by AD puppy litters, and found that this additional socialisation improved scores on separation-related behaviour, anxiety, body sensitivity, and distraction, compared with puppies that did not receive the extra socialisation [31]. Another study correlated temperament traits with puppy raiser factors; older raisers and raisers with previous experience in puppy raising were associated with better outcomes for dog traits, and dogs left at home for 1 to 2 hours at a time showed fewer separation anxiety behaviours than dogs which were left home for no longer than 1 hour at a time [21]. Bray et al [13] found that remaining longer with the puppy raiser was associated with better outcomes, as was less maternal behaviour when the puppies were in the litter. Dogs bred in the AD facility showed more desirable behaviour in another study [10]. A final study found that, among operational dogs, the quality of assistance provided by the AD was worse among owners who reported having vocal difficulties (for example; problems with singing, coughing, or speaking loudly) [15].

Approximately one year of age seems to be the time when predictors are most reliable. This could be due to a preference for testing at that age, as several of the studies tested dogs only at that age. However, some studies tested at several different ages and, generally, the predictive validity of the tests employed was greatest when the dogs were around one year old. A notable exception to this general rule was maternal behaviour towards puppies up to three weeks of age, as noted in Bray et al [13]. We suspect that maternal behaviour may be indicative of some other relevant characteristic, perhaps anxiety in the breeding bitch. Regardless, it is very difficult to control for. When selecting a puppy as a trainee AD, observing how the mother interacts with the puppies may be instructive.

#### A note on interpreting predictive validity statistics

When attempting to interpret the results of reported statistics measuring predictive validity of individual traits or a suite of traits, a few important considerations should be noted. First, nearly all of the studies used different measures of behaviour or temperament, which makes comparisons between studies difficult. Second, some of the studies used desirable behaviour(s) as their outcome measure, rather than successful qualification as an AD, so whether all of the dogs that had these desirable behaviours ultimately qualified is not always known. Third, studies varied in the way results were reported; some reported how much of the variability within the sample could be explained by their chosen traits [for example; 20, 23], while others reported the extent to which their chosen characteristics would increase the likelihood of successful qualification [for example; 30]. This further restricts comparisons between studies, limiting the predictive validity for potential ADs beyond the samples employed within the studies themselves.

Also of note, the studies we found often included samples of dogs that would have been bred over generations for the traits deemed desirable by the organisations, many of which were measured as potential predictors of successful qualification as an AD [but see 11 for an exception]. This creates a selection bias inherent in the research, which reduces the variability that would otherwise exist for these characteristics, making it more difficult to observe statistically significant predictors. By extension, it suggests that generalising these results to a population not specifically bred for assistance work, may not be possible. As a hypothetical example, imagine a researcher trying to predict a dog’s weight, using its height as a potential predictor. In the general population there would likely be a strong relationship, as an adult Chihuahua will certainly weigh less, and be shorter, than an adult Great Dane. However, in a sample of Great Danes, the relationship would be weaker, precisely because all of the dogs are tall and have a similar weight. Therefore, the lack of variability in the sample itself negatively impacts the extent to which weight can predict height. This would probably also be the case among potential working dogs: because these dogs would be expected to have less variability in desirable traits (for example; boldness) than the general dog population, these traits may be less predictive of successful qualification in this group.

#### Other working dog populations

Working dog populations other than ADs were not included in [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary), because the traits that are considered desirable for other types of working dogs do not necessarily apply to ADs. For example, successful police dogs sometimes score high on aggression as puppies [5], but this is not at all desirable for ADs. Nonetheless, several studies have examined whether puppy behaviour, as measured by behavioural tests or surveys, can predict future qualification outcomes, and these results are presented in [Table 3](#_Table_3:_Summary). Because of the variation in desirable traits between ADs and other working types, this table does not include studies that only predicted adult temperament rather than qualification; instead, we only included reports of predictive validity in successful qualification as a working dog, in which pass/fail rates were provided. This table only includes studies that measured predictors of successful qualification or entry into the training program (as opposed to desirable temperament traits), and provide information about pass/fail rates.

#### Table 3: Summary of results for predictive validity in working dog success, for working types other than assistance

| **Author, year [citation]** | **Working type** | **Number of dogs** | **Number of humans** | **Age of testing** | **Type of test** | **Predictors of success** | **Predictive value** | **Fail % (for behaviour)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Jones, 2013 [7] | Military | 263  | 263 raisers (?) | temperament test - 18 months old; survey - before puppy raiser selected by provider | Behaviour and survey | Puppy raiser factors increasing success: previously attending dog training, leaving the dog alone for more than 4 hours per day, and reported interest in dog training Decrease: owning small pets (for example; rabbits or guinea pigs), living in a house or farm instead of an apartment, having children. | Owned a dog before = 7.6-fold increase.Interest in dog training = 3.24-fold increase.Apartment dwellers = 2.1-fold increase. | 75% |
| McGarrity et al, 2016 [26] | Detection  | 52  | Unspecified | three different time points (3, 6, 9, or 12 months old) | Behaviour | Strong correlation between coded behaviour and trainer's behaviour ratings: environmental stability (for example; confident, fearless response to various stimuli) strongly correlated with confidence, and moderately correlated with exploration. | 85% - 89% correct classification of dogs selected for training. (83% of initial sample selected for training) | 70% |
| Slabbert and Odendaal, 1999 [5] | Police | 167 | 4 evaluators | 8, 12, and 16 weeks6 months9 months | Behaviour | Obstacle test at 8 weeks: low scores = low success.Retrieval test at 8 and 12 weeks: high scores = low success.Startle test at 12 and 16 weeks:high scores = low successAggression test at 6 and 9 months: low scores = low success.6 and 9 month aggression, and 8 and 12 week retrieve strongest predictors. | n/a | 57% |
| Svobodova et al, 2008 [6] | Police  | 206  | 1 tester | 7 weeks | Behaviour | A higher weight at the time of testing, attitude to retrieval and tug of war, response to noise, and items related to movement: independent movement and interactions with tester; negotiating obstacles; entering a room; behaviour toward a person; behaviour in new environments. | n/a | 28% |

It can be seen from [Table 3](#_Table_3:_Summary) that several traits could help to predict successful qualification as a working dog other than an AD. In general, these tend to cluster around the concepts of fearlessness and confidence, although one study also showed that a higher level of aggression was desirable for police dogs [5]. The study aimed at understanding puppy raiser factors in successful qualification showed that leaving the dog at home alone for more than 4 hours per day, and living in an apartment instead of in a house or on a farm, increased the likelihood of qualification [7]. An interest in dog training, and previous experience with dog training, were also associated with success. These results suggest that the quality of time spent with the dog may matter more than the quantity, as noted by the authors themselves. Dogs living in an apartment may have a very different type of interaction with their raisers compared to those living in a house or on a farm, because apartment-dwellers must take their dog out with them, rather than simply letting the dog out onto their land without any interaction with the raiser.

Leaving the dog at home alone for at least four hours per day was associated with successful qualification. It is impossible to understand the direction of causality in this result: perhaps anxious dogs cannot be left at home for that length of time, so only relaxed dogs are experiencing this practice. However, it is also possible that leaving the dog at home alone for this period of time may result in less anxious dogs, by increasing the dog’s resilience to separation from humans, and increasing interactions between the raiser and dog when the raiser returns home. This also accords with an AD study which showed that being left at home for 1 to 2 hours at a time was associated with fewer separation-related behaviours than dogs left at home for less than 1 hour at a time [21]. However, a previous study examined pet dogs’ reactions to being left at home alone for various lengths of time [41]. They found that, when left alone for more than 2 hours, dogs showed increased greeting behaviours, more physical activity, and more attentive behaviours toward the owner when the owner returned home. Whether this indicates that the dog’s welfare was negatively impacted by that duration of owner absence is not entirely clear, but it does suggest that their behaviour is somewhat affected by long absences. Further research is needed to better understand the long-term effects, both positive and negative, of leaving dogs at home alone for several hours at a time.

While the studies summarised in [Table 3](#_Table_3:_Summary) focused on predictors of qualification for non-AD working dogs, and included only studies which reported pass/fail rates, our literature search also found other working dog studies which are relevant in different ways. For instance, three reviews provided an overview of the state of the science in working dogs [12, 16, 38]. Brady et al [12] undertook a systematic review of 16 studies which used behavioural tests to measure predictive validity of successful qualification in working dogs, including ADs and other types. According to their review, whose included studies also included in the current review, it is difficult to conclude that any particular behavioural tests can reliably predict success. However, predictive validity does increase over time, such that results from a dog tested between 12 and 18 months may be more reliable than results from tests performed at a younger age. These results generally accord with two other reviews. One found that lateralisation (for example; handedness) in dogs can sometimes be used to predict working dog success, but not always [16]. The other highlighted the relatively low heritability of desirable traits in working dogs, suggesting that the impact of environmental factors on success rates must be considerable [38]. This was confirmed in a behavioural study showing that heritability can explain only between 5% and 37% of certain traits [35], and another study which determined that a puppy behaviour test at 8 weeks old was not a good predictor of adult dog behaviour [37].

Brady et al [12] contend that, overall, there does not appear to be a ‘behavioural phenotype’ (for example; a suite of observable characteristics resulting from the interaction between genetic and environmental influences) which can be used to predict working dog success. This could be due to the selection processes that take place before research of this type even begins. Most of these studies include potential working dogs, as opposed to dogs drawn from the general population, and this results in the selection bias mentioned above (see ‘a note on interpreting predictive validity statistics’ above).

The remainder of the studies included in the results of our review employed behaviour tests to measure desirable characteristics. In most cases, working dog populations were used, but two studies used dogs from other sources [25, 29]. One such study used shelter dogs to validate a behaviour test, called the ‘Ethotest’, that the authors developed to determine suitability for work in animal-assisted interactions (AAI; for example; visiting aged care facilities or schools) [25]. Dogs were selected based on entry into the shelter, and there was no behavioural pre-screening before the study; therefore, this study was not limited by the same type of selection bias that has affected many studies with working dogs – which often include only dogs bred for a specific purpose. All dogs were tested using the newly developed Ethotest, as well as being independently evaluated by a Delta Society assessor, using their established test for accepting animals into the AAI program. The study found that, in a sample of 23 dogs of varying ages, only two dogs that did not pass the Ethotest did pass the independent evaluation by a Delta Society assessor and go on to be accepted into the AAI program. Furthermore, one year later, of the seven dogs that qualified for the Delta Society program, only one had been subsequently excluded, and that was one of the two that failed the Ethotest. Therefore, in this small sample of shelter dogs, the Ethotest appears to be a valid way to determine suitability for AAI work. It is not known, however, whether some dogs that failed both the Ethotest and the Delta Society assessment may also have been successful, as this was not tested. Whether the results are applicable to ADs is also unclear, because the requirements for AAI work are different from AD work, although several of the desirable traits (for example; calm demeanour, tolerant of new things) would overlap.

One study used pet dogs to determine whether certain personality traits predicted success in a working dog trial [29]. A large number of dogs (N = 1994) between 12 and 18 months old were tested and ranked as a low, medium, or high scorer on the working dog trial. Dogs that rated low on the personality trait ‘boldness’ were more often in the low-scoring working dog trial group, while dogs that rated highly on boldness were more often in the high-scoring trial group. There is a difference between working trial and actual work, so the relevance for working dogs is not clear. However, some of the studies exploring desirable traits in working dog populations showed similar results. For instance, one study showed that police dogs scored higher for courage, hardness, prey drive, defence drive, and nerve stability than what is typically seen in dogs of their breed (for example; Labrador retriever or German shepherd) [36], and many of these traits could relate to boldness.

Another study used a behaviour test on 71 dogs at 15-18 months of age, and a questionnaire on their puppy raisers when the dogs were 14 months old [18]. Dogs that were selected for further training scored low on stranger-directed fear, non-social fear, dog-directed fear, and touch sensitivity, all of which could relate to the personality trait ‘boldness’, depending on the measurement tools. Dogs selected for training in this study also scored highly on trainability, hyperactivity/restlessness, and chasing/following shadows or light spots. Similarly to Jones [7], successful dogs in this study were also more likely to be left at home for at least four hours per day. A key finding of this study was that puppy raisers were able to reliably predict whether a dog possessed the traits deemed to be desirable by the training organisation [18].

The use of non-experts in providing dog behaviour ratings deserves attention because experts may not always be available to assist with working dog assessments, especially if the dog is not being trained by a provider, but by the eventual owner. That puppy raisers are capable of recognising behaviours in their dogs is promising, although it is not known how much time the raiser must spend with the dog before getting to know it sufficiently well to make these sorts of determinations. To that end, one study of military working dogs and explosive-detection dogs compared expert and non-expert behaviour ratings [19]. For this study, the expert was a single individual who had 22 years of experience in rating dogs on the assessment used in the study. The non-experts were undergraduates at the University of Texas at Austin, who had no previous experience in dog behaviour ratings, although all of them had either previously lived with a dog, or were living with a dog at the time of the study. They were trained for one hour by watching a video of the assessment, and were told how the expert had scored each behaviour of interest. After training, the experimental condition found the correlation between expert and non-expert ratings for the military dogs across all 10 items was r = 0.82. As an r-value of 1.00 would indicate complete agreement between raters and non-raters, a correlation of 0.82 is very high. For the explosive detection dogs, the correlations were somewhat lower, at r = 0.46 for the environmental assessment, and r = 0.59 for the hunt assessment [19]. Therefore, the utility of non-expert ratings for working dog behaviour seems to vary from moderate to strong, depending on the specific measures.

Since the existing research suggests that environmental factors likely play a large role in a potential working dog’s success or failure, it is surprising that our literature search found just one paper that focused on whether training styles have any impact on qualification [24]. The reason for this is unclear, but it could be due to a reluctance on the part of the participating organisations to change training practices that they believe to be successful, in order to compare with other training styles. Considering the high costs of training and placing ADs, provider organisations may be understandably hesitant to risk a higher failure rate if a novel training method is unsuccessful. Nonetheless, because training is a crucial component of the qualification process, it is worth investigating whether the use of aversive training methods, as opposed to rewards-based methods, could make a difference in eventual qualification. This study tested 33 military working dogs, between 1 and 5 years of age, at two time points, approximately 20 days apart. Dogs were tested on obedience and protection exercises, and the authors found that aversive training methods were used more often in protection work than in obedience. However, appetitive stimuli (for example; food rewards) were used more often than aversive stimuli or nothing at all. Dogs with higher performances received fewer aversives than lower performing dogs [24], although the direction of causality could not be determined. Maybe dogs performed badly because they were exposed to aversive methods, or maybe they were exposed to aversive methods because they were performing badly. Further research into training methods and other aspects of a trainee working dog’s environment is needed, given the lack of heritability of desirable traits highlighted above.

Since firm conclusions about the predictive validity of existing puppy tests cannot be drawn based on available evidence, it may be worth considering alternative behaviours to test. Dog cognition research has experienced a resurgence in recent decades [42], and the results of a large number of studies indicate that dogs have an ability to communicate with humans which appears to be unique in the animal kingdom [42]. There are now several well-established social and physical cognitive tests which have been used extensively in dogs, but whether they could be of benefit in predicting working dog qualification is an open question. A PhD thesis has therefore attempted to better understand whether these tests have any applied value in this context [8]. Assessments included: a test measuring the extent to which dogs rely on humans to help them solve a problem; a test measuring whether dogs can effectively read human communicative gestures (for example; pointing cues); two inhibitory control tests; tests measuring an understanding of cause and effect; and a test measuring whether the dogs understand object permanence. In general, a higher degree of problem-solving ability in physical cognitive tasks (for example; cause and effect, object permanence), and a greater willingness to communicate and cooperate with humans in the socio-cognitive tasks, was associated with greater suitability for the working role as a detection dog [8]. Tests such as these may have some utility in predicting working dog success in the future; whether these results would also apply to ADs is not known, but problem-solving ability and a willingness to cooperate with humans both seem relevant for AD work.

#### Failure rates

A critical component of understanding a measure’s predictive validity for successful qualification as a working dog is the failure rate. Unfortunately, this was not always reported. Among the 16 studies that did report failure rates due to behavioural considerations, including 10 focusing on ADs, the percentage of dogs which did not successfully complete training ranged from 24% to 75%. One study reported a failure rate of 17%, but this study only included dogs that had already qualified, so this 17% represented the percentage of dogs which were removed from the program due to behavioural problems after certification and placement [14]. The 75% failure rate was observed in 263 German shepherds in training to become military working dogs [7]. The second highest failure rate, at 70%, was reported in two separate studies, including a study of 23 shelter dogs being evaluated for an AAI program [25], and another study examining 152 detection dogs in training [26]. Meanwhile, the lowest failure rates were generally observed in ADs, which represented seven of the lowest eight failure rates reported in the literature. In fact, the highest failure rate reported for ADs was 50% [36], in a study measuring predictors of success in a variety of working dog types. Among studies which focused exclusively on ADs, the highest failure rate reported was 49% [11]. As stated above, these failure rates were among dogs which had typically been purpose bred for assistance work, so the failure rates may be much higher in a random sample of dogs (for example; from a shelter or bred for companionship).

### Discussion

It is clear from a review of existing literature that predictors of success in working dogs, including ADs, are limited, especially in terms of reliability at a young age. While several studies report some predictive validity of various measures, there are no clear-cut conclusions that can be drawn. This was confirmed in existing reviews and individual research reports, and is especially true for very young dogs, although there is some evidence of predictive value in various tests even when puppies are still in the litter. The fact that qualification failure rates are high despite provider organisations’ expertise in breeding and selecting for particular traits, further confirms this reality. Since most studies suggested that behavioural assessments are most reliable at about one year of age, it is possible that expecting to predict success at a younger age is simply not realistic. This is shown most clearly in the failure rates reported in the studies (see [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary)), which varied from 24% to 49%, even in dogs which were typically purpose-bred for assistance work and trained by individuals with extensive experience in AD training. Therefore, it would be risky for the NDIA to invest in training and dog-related costs before AD qualification as outcomes could not be assured.

The sample sizes for these studies were generally very good. All but six [11, 15, 23, 31-33] included at least 100 dogs or people; of these six, three had at least 50 [15, 23, 33]. Despite the good sample sizes, there are two main limitations of the existing literature when considering whether the results of these studies would apply to individuals who are interested in training their own AD. First, most of these studies primarily included dogs that were part of a breeding program through a large provider organisation. This could mean that the effects observed really apply most readily for dogs that have been purpose-bred over generations to perform this work. Indeed, the two studies that used shelter dogs, whose breeding history was not able to be controlled for, showed mixed results. One, with the smallest sample of 9 dogs, did not show predictive validity for the behavioural tests they used [32]. The other study, with a larger sample of 75 dogs, was more promising [33]. Therefore, it is possible that a larger sample size would further increase the power of the statistical analyses, and provide clearer outcomes in the future.

The second limitation of these studies was that behavioural assessments were typically (but not exclusively) undertaken by experts with extensive experience in dog behaviour. The questionnaire-based studies, however, generally relied on puppy raisers or AD owners, who would therefore be very familiar with their own dog, but would not be expected to have expertise about dog behaviour generally. The single study showing moderate to strong correlations between expert and non-expert dog behaviour ratings showed promise in this respect [19]. At the present time, however, most existing information suggests that, in order to reliably predict whether a dog has the appropriate traits to succeed in AD training, a person would either need to spend a lot of time with that individual dog or be an expert in dog behaviour. Even then, prediction rates are relatively poor.

It is likely that success is impacted by the dog’s experiences in the first year of its life. Indeed, the effects of socialisation in puppies on adult dog outcomes is well-documented [43], and even one of the studies in [Table 2](#_Table_2:_Summary) found that puppies receiving extra socialisation had positive behavioural outcomes later on compared to puppies receiving normal socialisation [31]. However, controlling for this in human homes is virtually impossible, although attending socialisation classes for puppies may prove worthwhile. Other puppy raiser factors that were associated with AD qualification outcomes were the dog remaining longer with the raiser, being an older raiser and having previous experience in puppy raising, and leaving the dog at home alone for 1 to 2 hours per day, as opposed to less than 1 hour. While these factors are associated with success, they may not be causal and can also be challenging to control. They nonetheless provide useful information about potential guidelines for good practice in puppy raiser selection.

The advantage of systematic reviews is that every step is well-documented, which means they are replicable. They are recommended practice in reviewing scientific literature [4]. However, because they require adherence to strict search guidelines, some relevant publications may be excluded. Despite this potential limitation, we adopted this technique for the current report because of its transparency. Furthermore, since our results generally agree with the other literature reviews we have found on this topic, which all report limited predictive validity of behaviour tests in working dog qualification, we believe that the literature included in the current review is representative of the field as a whole, even if some relevant publications were not included on the basis of the search criteria.

## Interviews with trainers: describing common selection and training practices

The existing research exploring predictors of success in working dog qualification showed mixed results. However, interviews with experts in AD training and placement may be able to provide further insights about the practice of AD selection and training. Since lived experience is an important consideration for the NDIA when considering whether a support can be considered effective and beneficial and developing participant plans [44] consultation with experienced individuals was deemed relevant for this study. Not all ADs are trained by professional trainers working with provider organisations; sometimes people with disability may choose to train their own AD. Since many provider organisations have long waiting lists, this alternative method for AD training and certification should be investigated.

### Methods

Ethics approval for the interviews was obtained from the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee (approval number HEC18329).

#### Interview respondents

We recruited 12 people with experience in training ADs. These included professional trainers working in AD provider organisations, those who provided support to individuals training their own AD, as well as people with disability who successfully trained their own AD. Since there is no objective, legal definition of ‘successfully trained’, we recruited people who perceived that they had successfully trained their own AD. For this reason, we cannot guarantee that the owner-trained ADs were trained to the same standard that would be expected of a provider organisation, or the extent to which they successfully mitigated the effects of their owner’s disability. In total, ten were from Australia and two were from the United States. We recruited outside of Australia due to a concern that we would not obtain a sufficient sample size if we recruited only within Australia. Four of the 12 respondents reported having experience across two different roles; six individuals had trained their own AD, seven had worked for an organisation that provided support to owners training their own AD, and three had worked for an AD provider organisation at the time of the interview ([Table 4](#_Table_4:_Summary)). Respondents were not specifically asked to state the type(s) of disability for which they trained ADs, but most volunteered this information; it is presented in [Table 4](#_Table_4:_Summary).

#### Table 4: Summary of interview respondent location and experience with assistance dog training

| **ID** | **Location** | **Owner-trainer** | **Program for owner-trainers** | **Provider organisation** | **AD Type(s)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Australia | X |  |  | Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 2 | Australia | X |  |  | Mobility |
| 3 | Australia | X | X |  | Medical Alert/Response, Mobility, Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 4 | USA |  | X | X | Hearing Alert, Mobility, Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 5 | Australia | X |  |  | \*not shared |
| 6 | USA |  | X | X | Medical Alert (blood glucose, seizure), Mobility, Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 7 | Australia | X |  |  | Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 8 | Australia |  | X |  | Medical Alert (blood glucose, cortisol), Mobility, Psychiatric/Developmental Disability  |
| 9 | Australia | X | X |  | Mobility, Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 10 | Australia |  | X |  | Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 11 | Australia |  |  | X | Medical Alert (seizure), Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |
| 12 | Australia |  | X |  | Psychiatric/Developmental Disability |

####  Measures

We developed an interview schedule based on a preliminary review of existing literature in AD training practices, including scientific publications and available information on AD provider organisation websites. The interview questions first aimed to establish the respondent’s previous experience in AD training, and then proceeded to elicit their perceptions of best practice in AD selection and training. We also asked them to describe the advantages and disadvantages of owner-trained versus provider-trained ADs, regardless of whether they had trained their own AD or worked for a provider.

#### Procedure

We recruited respondents through social media sites emphasising dog-owner relationships or studies of dog behaviour, as well as emails to professional contacts of the research team. After a potential respondent expressed interest in participating in an interview, they were emailed a document with information about the study and a consent form to sign and return. Once the consent form was returned to the research team, a convenient time to conduct the interview was arranged. All interviews took place via telephone or online teleconference (for example; Zoom; Skype) and were audio-recorded for later analysis. Each interview took approximately one hour, and the interviewer took detailed notes throughout; the interviews were also transcribed in full by [Rev](http://www.rev.com/) after completion. While the interviews generally followed the interview schedule, each interview varied slightly depending on whether information provided by the respondent merited a follow-up question specific to that person’s experience.

#### Analysis

Interview notes and transcripts were analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, to determine themes in the data for each topic of interest.

### Results

#### Can individuals successfully train their own AD?

All but one of the respondents (page 11) were generally supportive of people training their own AD. However, all of these individuals recommended working with a mentor in order to be successful in training. As one interviewee stated, “...if the person has a disability, they can train their dog, but they do need a mentor or a person with them to help them go through it, help them work with the dog and explain it so they understand… Anyone can do it as long as you have the right support” (page 7). Others specified that the mentorship needed to be from a certified professional. One participant perceived that “the highest qualification for a dog trainer is a certificate IV companion animal services…It's really important that everybody should have that minimum qualification” (page 10).

Interviewees brought up factors that would affect the feasibility of an individual training their own AD. The amount of professional support needed was said to vary based on the individual’s situation, disability-related limitations, knowledge and interest in dog behaviour and training, and support from other members of the household.

The type of disabilities an individual had were thought to impact the feasibility of owner-training an AD. Several respondents suggested that owner-training was especially beneficial for individuals with specific disabilities, such as “people with mental issues…anxiety, depression, PTSD, ASD, learning disability” (page 12). On the other hand, interviewees suggested that certain disabilities were incompatible with owner-training. “[If] you've got a person who is wheelchair bound and has got paralysis in their body, they do need to have a dog that's at least, if not fully trained, partially trained” (page 8) and “if it's a seeing-eye dog…it's very hard to train it yourself, because you actually can't walk outside and train the dog” (page 11).

Other circumstances were believed to make it difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to train their own AD. Multiple respondents voiced concern for individuals taking on AD training alone: “if people like myself didn't have a family that could help with especially the initial training…I would have struggled” (page 2), and “people that have the most success, also have back-up in the home… if a person has good days and bad days and they don't have a spouse or someone with them to take on some of the responsibility, the failure rate would be huge” (page 6). Handlers were said to also need to have the emotional capacity to understand that “the welfare of the dog comes first” (page 1) and could not be aggressive or volatile. They needed to have the “patience and understanding to walk away…[rather than] beat it senseless, because it doesn't understand that it's done the wrong thing” (page 1). How respondents determined that a particular individual would be suitable to train a dog was not specified, however.

In terms of training tools and techniques, participants generally recommended positive reinforcement-based training techniques, because “the dog's got to want to do those tasks” (page 11). They also cautioned that there could be undesirable consequences of using aversives in training: “if we use punishment on these dogs…[they] become fearful and that's when the dogs start to go backwards” (page 8). The best equipment was thought to be different for each individual, but most participants encouraged the use of “food as a reward” (page 10) and actively opposed the use of choke chains and prong collars: “Under no circumstances do we have electric collars, prong collars, or anything of that nature” (page 11).

#### Choosing a dog

One big difference between receiving an AD from a provider organisation and training one as an individual, lies in the requirement to select a dog with which to begin the training process. Interviewees had different experiences, ranging from those who started with an existing family pet to those who temperament tested young puppies from an established network of “proven” AD breeders. In general, all respondents emphasised the importance of overall good health and temperament. For example, interviewees reported that they “had to have a letter saying that we're clear from any illnesses…and [had] no health issues” (page 1) and that the puppies “can't be too shy [and] they can't be aggressive” (page 6).

Individuals selecting their own AD suggested that “it's so important that handlers are able to choose the dogs that fit them best” (page 3), including personal preferences for breed and appearance. One respondent explained that “[her] daughter had certain preferences of exactly what she was looking for in a dog. It had to be yellow, because the dog's name is Elsa from the movie Frozen, and Elsa has the yellow hair. So we had to have the yellow dog” (page 7).

When it came to the source of the dog, numerous individuals suggested acquiring a puppy from a breeder with a history of producing successful ADs. In evaluating puppies, respondents specified looking for “the one who is people [-oriented], not dog-oriented” (page 6) and “puppies that aren't reckless, but aren't too scared… We want thoughtful. Thoughtful and independent, and we're looking for a puppy that's going to be able to bond. That's critical” (page 11).

While some interviewees dismissed the possibility of working with an existing pet, others found success in taking advantage of a pre-existing relationship. They reported that existing pets could be successful if they were “calm, non-reactive to other dogs, non-reactive to people, basically bomb proof” (page 10) during an initial assessment. “The main things that I'm looking for…are going to be a dog that is environmentally and socially confident… I don't want a high arousal rate” (page 4).

Working with dogs from a shelter or rescue was also controversial. While some individuals welcomed the idea, stating that dogs didn’t need to come from “a specific lineage to get these dogs to work” (page 8), others cautioned that “with rescues, we don't have medical history, so that makes it a bit more difficult” (page 9). Many individuals preferred to source their puppies from a breeder who had produced successful ADs in the past. In addition, one interviewee reported only recommending breeders who “agree in writing with us to do the neurological early stimulation” (page 12).

One respondent had purchased an older puppy who had been “started” (socialisation and toilet training) by the breeder, such that the puppy passed the organisation’s pre-Public Access assessment and was granted an in-training jacket immediately after being placed with the respondent’s family. Another interviewee said that “if I can have my hands on that puppy for the first month…I think that is actually my favourite way to do this…because [the families] have got enough to do. And I know how to do it better than they do” (page 6). She reported taking puppies from eight to 12 weeks of age to introduce car trips, basic obedience, and “…to potty train him and crate train him”, such that the client would have had the best chance for success with the puppy.

#### Recommended assessments

Individuals who either ran or worked with a training organisation reported a series of assessments throughout the training process.

Initial intake assessments were recommended to evaluate suitability of both the handler and potential AD. “Early on, when we first started, we just did a meet and greet and assessed my ability that I could control a dog…[and] see whether the dog would be suitable to be trained up” (page 2).

Multiple respondents recommended that dogs and their handlers should have to pass an assessment to obtain public access rights during the training process. As one respondent stated, “everybody should have to do a public access test before their dog is allowed to go into public...Some of the organizations that are out there you just pay them some money and they give you a jacket and off you go, and the dog is totally unsuitable” (page 5). Several trainers reported requiring their clients complete a “mock” Public Access test or Canine Good Citizen assessment before receiving an in-training vest for the dog to be in public settings that were not pet-friendly.

In Queensland, a state in Northern Australia, state legislation has been enacted for certifying ADs. Consistent with this, interviewees suggested that, at the end of the training process, handler-dog teams should be required to complete a formal assessment. For example, interviewees stated beliefs that “I wanted to know that somebody else assessed us and said ‘Yes, your dog is okay’” (page 5) and “every assistance dog should be tested independently...I could sort of say, yep my dog is ready to go, but I believe that you need that separation to say [the dog] meets their requirements” (page 2).

Finally, when it came to determining when dogs needed to be retired, some interviewees thought that an unbiased assessor could be beneficial, to identify when retirement is appropriate; “[you] get quite attached and you [do] not want to let go…I think there's a possibility there that somebody may need to sort of say, hey maybe it's time to think about it” (page 2).

#### Financial investment

While many interviewees reported that cost was one of the prohibitive factors associated with the decision not to get a provider trained AD, training one’s own AD was not thought to be affordable either. There were many reported expenses related to the selection, training, accreditation, and upkeep of owner-trained ADs, “from purchasing the pup through the training through the [Public Access Test], it cost us about $7,000” (page 9). Specifically, many interviewees emphasised the importance of hiring professional support “[from a] trainer which is something I would highly recommend, and I would definitely even do again. Even though I've been through this process myself, I wouldn't do it alone” (page 5).

Even after being fully trained, owner-trained ADs were reported to have additional upkeep expenses as compared to ADs from provider organisations. One interviewee mentioned that although many owner-trainers do not have third-party liability insurance, this was an important extra expense. “Organization dogs are generally covered with insurance… if their dog happens to get sick and damages something because it's sick or it bumps into a shelf and breaks something…where owner trainers aren't and I wanted to make sure that that was covered for me. I don't want to go through potentially a lawsuit and whatever…[so] my pet insurance is more expensive than general pet insurance, because it covers third party liability” (page 5).

There was a lack of consensus about whether maintenance costs such as food, preventative medications, and veterinary costs were considered AD-related expenses. While some owner-trainers felt that “if you can't afford a pet dog, you really shouldn't be getting an assistance dog” (page 7), others believed that all costs were AD-related and should receive monetary support. “If I didn't have the disability I wouldn't have a dog because I couldn't afford a dog. So it's hard when I'm expected to cover some of these costs because they're saying they are pet dog expenses” (page 5).

Somewhat surprisingly, several owner-trainers suggested that AD-related expenses should only be supported by “…some degree of funding… just [for] the working life of the dog” (page 3), or more specifically, after the dog-handler team becomes accredited. “If I was the NDIS I wouldn't provide any funds until the dog is accredited, because anything can happen leading up to it…. I believe after the dog is accredited, then it would be nice to receive some financial assistance to pay for their food and all that, because they are [mitigating disability]... even though they're working prior up to it, the dog may not pass the test, and all this funding has been given to a dog that hasn't passed the test. And then you're just left with a pet that's been funded up until [that point]” (page 7).

#### Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Owner-trained ADs

The reported advantages and disadvantages of owner-training an AD versus acquiring one from a provider organisation varied across a wide spectrum (Figure 1).



#### Figure 1 (above): Perceived advantages and disadvantages of owner-trained ADs, provider-trained ADs, and ADs generally

The process of owner-training an AD reportedly develops important dog training and problem-solving skills, as well as an ability to understand dog body language. It was thought to be a challenging but rewarding process that empowered the owners. Owner-training also allowed for individualisation of not only the training process but also the tasks that would be most effective in mitigating the owner’s disability. For example, “most organizations don't do multiple diagnoses so you have to have a specific diagnosis” (page 4), and many provider organisations were said to have strict rules such as not allowing other pets in the home or not allowing the AD to be left alone for more than two hours at a time. As one respondent put it, “if you don't fit the mould of the larger organisations, here is something else you could do” (page 7).

When asked about task training, several interviewees reported that owner-trained ADs would spontaneously offer untrained task behaviours such as alerting to seizures, blood-sugar changes, or body temperature fluctuations. These spontaneous behaviours were thought to reflect the strong bond between owner-trainer and their AD, “my dog was never trained for seizure alerting, but he instinctively learnt supposedly through the bond” (page 5). They also suggested that owner-trained dogs may not have as solid a command of obedience but developed superior problem-solving skills, which, again, was attributed to the relationship that develops during the training process. “[When] they're the ones doing the training, you get a bond…[and] a level of cooperation and problem solving that I don't see as much in the sort of scenarios where the person isn't doing the training” (page 4).

On the other hand, interviewees cautioned that owner-training required a lot of work and time and was a large commitment that many individuals are not prepared or not able to make. Finding a suitable mentor was also a challenge; the lack of industry regulation made it difficult to find credible help and interviewees suggested that there “need[s] to be some sort of regulation on people training people with assistance dogs” (page 8).

One respondent cautioned that owner-training an AD could inadvertently aggravate rather than mitigate symptoms. “For instance…post-traumatic stress. You're getting the dog to help you to go into community…[but] if you can't go somewhere, how are you going to train the dog to go there without being concerned? …[You] end up in a situation where both… the dog and the person become anxious” (page 11). Some individuals also reported that owner-trained ADs had a lesser public image than provider-trained ADs, and noted concern that owner-trained ADs could be perceived as fraudulent. Participants also suggested that individuals with invisible disabilities and “non-traditional” breeds of ADs had more trouble with public access. “I've had to explain to people why I'm [owner-training] and that it is going to be trained with the same skills that a $30,000 dog's going to have…I've had people basically tell me that it's an eBay dog” (page 7).

### Discussion

The interview results suggest that most respondents believe it is possible, at least in principle, for an individual to train their own AD. There may even be several distinct advantages and disadvantages to both owner-trained and provider-trained ADs. The key perceived advantages of owner-trained ADs are a stronger dog-owner bond, and development of useful training skills by the owner, which can lead to a sense of empowerment. The main perceived disadvantages are the time-consuming nature of the training process, and a total lack of industry regulation. This could lead to lesser public acceptance of owner-trained dogs compared to those obtained from an AD provider organisation.

The results of the interviews accorded with the very limited research previously reported. Generally speaking, there is very little scientific research available examining owner-trained ADs. One study compared the effectiveness of provider-trained and owner-trained diabetes alert dogs, as well as dogs which were not trained but who spontaneously began alerting [27]; those results are described in the literature review above. We could find only one other report, an unpublished Master’s thesis, which included an auto-ethnographic study on the experiences of an AD owner-trainer with a vision impairment [45]. By the time of writing her thesis, the author had handled three different dog guide s from a provider organisation, acted as a puppy raiser for two puppies through an autism AD provider, and, after those experiences, trained her own AD [45].

According to this thesis, the main advantage of using an owner-trained AD is the strong bond that develops between dog and owner, which was also reported in our interviews. When the dog lives with the owner as a puppy, the owner has much more control over the important developmental periods in the dog’s life, and they can form a very deep level of trust [45]. The main disadvantage is that the general public tends to be less ‘forgiving’ of owner-trained ADs, noticing small behavioural errors that may go unnoticed in provider-trained dogs. For this reason, Sillaby [45] claims that owners of owner-trained ADs should have a higher training standard and be very proactive about maintenance training compared with owners of provider-trained ADs. However, she does not provide any details about how exactly she trained the dog, or what this ‘higher standard’ would look like in practice. She did explain that the dog was three years old when she decided it was ready to take the Assistance Dogs International public access test, after which she considered the dog to be a fully qualified dog guide [45].

An important recurring theme in Sillaby’s [45] thesis was the idea that ADs are not machines, but fallible living creatures who sometimes make mistakes, regardless of who trained them. However, she sees the value in permitting people with disability to train their own AD due to the current waitlists for many provider organisations, and the inability of providers to meet all disability-related needs. As one of her fellow owner-trainers said, “if we do not allow owner-trained dogs it’s like saying that nobody can work on their own car, because it may be putting people at risk” [45 p. 134]. Perhaps for this reason, many interview respondents recommended having a mentor during the training process, and having independent assessments for the public access test and when the dog is reaching retirement age. Having external advice and independent evaluation of the team’s work can help ensure that behavioural standards are maintained and that the AD continues to be effective in its working role. However, the individual’s own abilities are also an important consideration; the nature of the person’s disability, their experience with dogs, and the support of others, will also impact the training success. To borrow the car analogy mentioned above, a person who knows nothing about cars should not be allowed to make mechanical changes to a car and then take it on the road without any independent assessment; a person who works on their own car is liable for any failures of function that occur due to the changes that the person has made.

While our results agreed with those reported by Sillaby [45], the current study extended previous findings by also exploring selection and training of owner-trained ADs. All respondents agreed that selecting the right dog is very important, regardless of whether the source is a shelter, breeder, or an existing family pet. In general, a confident, calm demeanour was considered to be desirable in terms of temperament, and physical health was crucial.

When asked the extent to which the NDIA should fund owner-trained ADs, opinions varied widely. Some respondents argued that all costs associated with the dog should be funded, including those that would apply to any companion animal (for example; food, toys); these interviewees indicated that some people with disability would not be able to afford to have a companion dog, but since the AD is an important assistive tool, all costs should be met by the NDIA. A similar argument was made by focus group members in a previous report to the NDIA about AD effectiveness [1]. At the other extreme, some interview respondents suggested that the NDIA should only fund ADs once they have been fully trained and certified.

This study included 12 people with experience in AD selection and training, including for owner-trained ADs. This sample size was sufficient to obtain a broad range of perspectives, but a limitation of the results is that we were unable to reach saturation, the point at which no new information is being presented in the interviews. It is possible that we may have missed important insights. For this reason, future research should extend the current findings with a larger sample of experts. There was also probably a selection bias inherent in these interviews; individuals who agreed to be interviewed were, by and large, supportive of owner-trained ADs. We contacted many provider organisations in Australia requesting their participation in the study, but we did not hear back from most of them, so insights from organisations/people who disapprove of owner-trained ADs were unavailable to us, unfortunately. As with all interview research, the results presented reflect the individual respondent’s experience, making them subjective by nature. While this type of evidence is instructive due to the lack of other types of available evidence on this topic (for example; validated survey instruments, direct behavioural observations), the extent to which the reported findings apply to other members of the AD community requires further investigation.

## Guidelines for NDIS participant-trained assistance dog selection and training – Next steps

Based on the results of the literature review and interviews, we were unable to develop good practice guidelines for owner-trained AD selection and training. We examined other publicly available material, such as Queensland government (Appendix A) and Assistance Dog International (ADI) guidelines (Appendix B) for passing the public access test (PAT). ADI minimum standards for owner-trained ADs are also provided in Appendix C. These represent a good starting point for the types of dog behaviours that should be considered during the certification process, but do not provide detail about how to select or train a dog before certification. Therefore, we cannot offer recommendations for selecting, training, and accrediting participant-trained ADs, or for funding these processes. However, we do recommend that the NDIA continue to provide NDIS funding for trained assistance dogs based on their current practices (for example; based on an NDIS delegate assessment that the support would meet the criteria for a reasonable and necessary support for that participant), We can provide recommendations for the types of research needed to enable the development of future guidelines for selection, training and certification of participant-trained ADs.

### Finding a training mentor

If an NDIS participant is interested in training their own AD, a mentor may be beneficial to help them ensure a successful selection, training, and certification process. However, the qualifications and experience required to become a mentor, as well as the procedure for being accredited as a mentor would need to be determined. Professional AD trainers would be the most likely mentors for participants who want to train their own AD but, to our knowledge, there are no post-secondary dog behaviour and training qualifications offered as degree programs at universities in Australia. A Certificate IV in Companion Animal Services offered by some TAFE institutes and Delta Society Australia includes units on animal behaviour and training, and the National Dog Training Federation offer a Certificate III in Dog Behaviour and Training. Guide Dogs Australia offer a three-year postgraduate training course to become an instructor. However, there are no specific qualifications required to call oneself a ‘dog trainer’. We recommend the development of a nationally accredited undergraduate or postgraduate degree program for training ADs; the course should ideally be offered by a registered training provider, in order to ensure independence from the industry, and cover a broad range of AD types, with evidence-based course content.

At the time of writing, the state of QLD has the only government-certified process for approving AD trainers across Australia (see Appendix D for more details). We strongly recommend the development of a national, independent certifying body, either for trainers as is done in QLD, or for AD-owner teams themselves. Austria has established a national coordinating authority that certifies all assistance dog/handler teams, regardless of where the dog was sourced or who trained the team [46]. This body is facilitated through the Messerli Research Institute at Vienna’s veterinary university, which consists of experts in veterinary medicine, ethology, animal cognition, ethics, and human-animal relationships [46]. We recommend that a similar coordinating authority be established in Australia.

### Selecting a dog

Selecting an appropriate dog for training as an AD is extremely challenging, as identified in Section 2. Early assessments cannot currently identify which dogs are most likely to be successful, but they can sometimes identify non-contenders (for example; dogs showing overt fearful or aggressive behaviour). Therefore, despite a substantial body of research to date, more is clearly needed. Details of existing limitations are described in Section 2 above. To summarise, research should aim to determine the most appropriate breeds, lines, and acquisition sources for dogs that are likely to succeed as ADs. Further research using shelter dogs or pet dogs should be conducted, as much research thus far has employed dogs specifically bred for AD work, and therefore any conclusions that can be drawn from existing data are limited to those breeds and working lines; they cannot be extrapolated to the larger population of dogs.

### Training and caring for the dog

AD provider organisations often select dogs that, they believe, possess the necessary suite of traits to become successful ADs in the future; indeed, some organisations even have in-house breeding programs designed to give all puppies a genetic advantage specifically for AD work. Despite these efforts, failure rates remain high. This suggests that environmental influences, including training and daily care practices, are highly important in AD success. Unfortunately, there is very little literature on training practices for ADs, as noted in the Section 2 literature review, although there were some studies that highlighted external factors during the puppy raiser period (for example; amount of time left at home alone, presence of children in the home) which were associated with, and could conceivably influence, a puppy’s eventual success as an AD.

More research is needed on the effects of various training practices on AD qualification and working success, as well as other aspects of the dog’s environment which could have an impact on certification. This could include research examining positive, reward-based training compared to ‘balanced’ training practices which include both punishments and rewards. Even within reward-based training styles, there may be a difference between reward types (for example; food or play), and the effects of clicker-training [47, 48] should also be examined in trainee ADs. Beyond training, the demographic make-up of the puppy raiser’s home (or, in the case of NDIS participant-trained ADs, the participant’s home), the amount of ‘quality time’ spent with the dog each day, the quality of the dog-raiser relationship, and raiser attachment style, all merit investigation.

In all likelihood, it is a combination of internal and external factors which determine whether a dog will ultimately qualify and successfully work as an AD. Given the large number of studies which have been done on selection and management practices thus far, we recommend that a meta-analysis of existing studies be undertaken, if possible, to strengthen statistical power and provide more insights into the effects of various factors on AD success. A meta-analysis of this kind would be instructive even despite a lack of focus on training methods in previous research.

### Initial certification

Guidelines for the AD-handler team’s initial certification process could be developed, at least in part, on the basis of existing material. In order to ensure a minimum standard of AD performance and welfare, we strongly recommend the development of a nationally recognised Public Access Test (PAT). All AD-handler teams funded by the NDIS could then be subject to a PAT, conducted by an unbiased, independent assessor (see Appendix A for an example from the Queensland government). Additionally, a veterinary health check confirming the dog’s physical ability to work should be provided as part of the certification. The PAT test and a health confirmation appear to be standard practice in most AD provider organisations [1]. Whether the PAT test is consistent across all organisations is less clear, but good templates do exist (see Appendices A and B).

As part of the certification, participants should also be required to provide proof of the task(s) the AD is trained to perform. Since an AD, by definition, must assist the owner/handler to mitigate the impacts of that person’s disability, evidence of this ability would be a reasonable requirement. However, the way in which the evidence is acquired may depend on the type of task performed. For example, a person with a vision impairment may be able to command their AD to lead them around an obstacle at any time, but an autism assistance dog that helps a child calm down during a meltdown cannot perform such a task on command, as inducing a meltdown in the child would be unethical. An independent accrediting body could consider the various tasks that ADs perform and determine how to collect evidence of each.

### Ongoing recertification

An annual re-certification (PAT and AD task assessment), or at least annual maintenance training to ensure continued good behaviour and task performance, is common among AD providers [1]. This includes proof of continued good health from a veterinarian to ensure the mental and physical health and welfare needs of the AD are being met. We recommend that this practice continue, and if an independent, national coordinating body is established to oversee the original certification of AD-handler teams, then the same body could also handle re-certifications. The body would need to develop the specific timeframes and requirements for re-certifications, based on current good practice within the industry.

### Final considerations

While we cannot provide guidelines for selection, training, and certification of ADs by NDIS participants, we do recommend that the NDIA consider providing funding support for the AD once the participant/dog team has been fully certified by an independent assessor registered with the state of QLD or an equivalent body, provided the AD is assessed by the NDIS delegate as being a reasonable and necessary support for the participant that assists the participant to mitigate the functional effects of their disability. Additionally, we rely heavily on the government of QLD’s requirements as a standard for trainer and AD certification. This is because QLD is leading the way on issues of government-certified ADs. We strongly recommend that other states follow suit, and that a national, independent accrediting body be considered to ensure AD quality control Australia-wide, regardless of whether they are provider-trained or owner-trained. This independent assessment should ideally not just include a test to ensure that the AD is sufficiently trained for public access, but also confirm that the AD does indeed assist the owner to mitigate the effects of their disability over and above that of a well-trained companion animal.

Finally, more research is needed to understand the extent to which some of the benefits conferred by ADs could be provided by a family pet. We are aware of only one scientific study specifically comparing ADs to pet dogs, which was recently accepted into the peer-reviewed journal, Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology [49]. This study asked people to describe the extent to which their dog helped them to thrive; assistance dog owners reported increased thriving due to their assistance dog, compared to owners of companion dogs, regardless of whether the owner had a disability. There have also been a couple of studies looking at the impact of a pet dog on a home with a child who has ASD, suggesting improvements in stress levels for the primary carers [50], and improvements in social skills among children with ASD who had attended formal dog training sessions with their dog [51]. We believe that it is possible that some people with disability could find that some impacts of their disability are effectively mitigated by a companion (pet) dog and could therefore potentially avoid the high costs associated with acquisition and maintenance of an AD (please see the companion report, ‘Key terms for animals in disability assistance roles’ for more information on the difference between a companion/pet dog and an AD). Caution must be taken when considering this possibility, however, since this is likely to depend greatly on the individual characteristics of the person and the nature and extent of their disability, and on the characteristics of the dog. Considerably more research is needed to truly disentangle the benefits of pet dogs compared with ADS.

## Conclusion

The aim of this project was to better understand selection and training practices for owner-trained ADs, with a view to developing good practice guidelines. We undertook a literature review of peer-reviewed studies investigating selection and training practices for ADs. The overwhelming majority of the studies we included explored the validity of using tests of puppy traits to predict eventual qualification as a working dog. We also interviewed people with experience in AD selection and training, to identify the perceived feasibility of owner-trained ADs, as well as their advantages and disadvantages.

Taken together, the results of the literature review and interviews suggest that owner-trained ADs are possible to produce, but that there are considerable challenges inherent in the process. For instance, interviewees were clear that certain characteristics were desirable in the dog, such as physical health and a calm temperament. However, the literature search results could not provide a definitive measure for assessing these desirable dog traits from an early age. It is likely to be possible to exclude some unsuitable puppies from consideration, but identifying successful and unsuccessful candidates, even in litters bred for a specific purpose, is currently impossible. Similarly, handler characteristics are also important, such as being calm and patient, being physically capable of training an AD, and having good communication skills. The support of others, including family members and/or a training mentor, may be needed.

The interviewees reported that there are advantages and disadvantages to owner-trained ADs, such as, potentially, a stronger dog-owner bond, and a sense of empowerment for the owner. Disadvantages included concerns about lack of public acceptance of owner-trained ADs and no regulation, as well as the likelihood that many people would not have the time to commit to training. Recommendations included having a mentor to aid the training process, independent assessments of public access readiness, and independent advice when considering whether to retire the AD as it ages.

Interview respondents had varying opinions about when owner-trained ADs should be funded as part of the NDIS. Some people argued that all costs should be borne as part of the Scheme, while others suggested that government should only fund ADs that have been fully trained and certified. Funding all costs would be prohibitive given that many participant-trained ADs would be likely to fail the training process after a considerable period of investment, potentially leading to recurrent costs as a person trials multiple dogs before finding one capable of success. This is also true of provider-trained ADs, of course, but the onus is on the provider to supply a fully trained dog prior to funding being received, so the costs of failures are borne by the provider rather than the NDIA.

Based on the outcomes of the literature review and interviews, we were unable to develop guidelines for participant-trained AD selection and training. More research is needed to better understand the factors that influence AD success, so that appropriate dogs can be selected for this work, and they can be managed and trained using practices that are most likely to result in successful qualification. At present, QLD is the only state that has a system in place for certifying ADs. We strongly recommend development of a national, independent accrediting body for ADs, regardless of whether they are provider-trained or owner-trained, with ongoing funding potentially being linked to the outcomes of a regular re-accreditation cycle.

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## Appendix A: Queensland Public Access Test and Certification Requirements

### Part A – Public Access Test

Section 35 of the guide, hearing and assistance dogs act 2009 provides that a public access test is a test approved by the chief executive to assess if a guide, hearing or assistance dog is:

* (a) safe and effective in a public place or public passenger vehicle; and
* (b) able to be controlled by:
	+ The primary handler of the dog; or
	+ The primary handler of the dog with support of an alternative handler.
* The public access test (pat) indicates the minimum standard that a dog must achieve to be considered safe and effective in accessing public places and public passenger vehicles on a daily basis.
* A public access test can only be conducted by an approved individual trainer or an employee trainer of an approved training institution approved under the guide, hearing and assistance dogs act 2009.
* A public access test conducted by a trainer that is not deemed approved under the act is an invalid test.
* Each of the nine (9) elements of the pat must be passed to demonstrate that the dog and handler perform at the required standard.

Grounds for immediate failure of the public access test:

* A dog that displays any inappropriate aggressive behaviour (growling, biting, raising hackles, showing teeth etc.)
* Any dog that urinates or defecates in a building or shows uncontrollable behaviour.
* Any dog that shows a display of guarding of people, territory, possessions or food.
* Any dog or handler who, due to their actions or behaviour, is likely to bring disrepute, For example; a lack or loss of good reputation or respect, to the dog, trainer or training institution.
* Any handler who is harsh on the dog or is not willing to abide by all relevant laws.
* A fail mark in any element of the pat

Scoring:

* A pass mark in all elements indicates dog displays appropriate behaviour
* A fail mark in any element indicates dog displays inappropriate behaviour

### Public Access Test Details

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date:** | **DD/MM/YYYY** |
| **Name of handler:** |  | **Date of Birth:** |
| **Primary Handler** |  |  |
| **Alternative Handler 1** |  |  |
| **Alternative Handler 2** |  |  |
| **Name of dog:** |  |
| **Dog’s DOB and/or approx. age:** | **DD/MM/YYYY** |
| **Breed of Dog** |  |
| **Microchip No.** |  |
| **Category:** | **Guide** | **Hearing** | **Assistance** |  |
| **Has the dog been declared a dangerous dog under local law?** | **Yes** |  | **No** |  |
| **Is the dog a restricted breed as defined under the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2007?** | **Yes** |  | **No** |  |
| **Is the dog de-sexed and vaccinated?** | **Yes** |  | **No** |  |
| **Name of trainer/ training institution:** |  |
| **Trainer/ training institution dog reference number (issued by trainer)** |  |

| Behaviours table | Pass | Fail |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Social behaviour | Pass | Fail |
| 1. Non-aggressive behaviour (to be demonstrated throughout Public Access Test)The dog has displayed appropriate behaviour. Inappropriate traits to observe are Growling, Biting, Raising hackles | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: | Blank | blank |
| 2. Well-managed | Pass | Fail |
| 2.1 The dog is settled, has a relaxed demeanour, is always under control and is unobtrusive [not pulling, or being in a state of higher arousal causing difficulty to handler] | Pass | Fail |
| 2.2 The dog is specifically trained to bark, to stop on command, and/or respond to voice/visual/signal/lead correction command | Pass | Fail |
| 2.3 The team/unit is not a hazard/nuisance to the public | Pass | Fail |
| 2.4 The dog is well-managed by the handler, for example; dog responds to handler’s demands. Handler praises/rewards dog | Pass | Fail |
| 2.5 The dog recovers if startled and does not respond aggressively, or show fear, or continue to be affected after the incident has taken place | Pass | Fail |
| 2.6 The dog is on a lead/harness at all times | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: | Blank | Blank |

| Behaviours table | Pass | Fail |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 3. Public places / public passenger vehiclesThe dog will remain responsive to handler, handler to be in control at all times. No excessive sniffing, drooling or grabbing of food, or excitability | Pass | Fail |
| 3.1 The dog sits under the handler’s chair/table or is out of the way (not a trip hazard), for a minimum of 5 minutes | Pass | Fail |
| 3.2 The dog shows control of food distraction, for example; heeling, controlled down. for example; dog stays in a controlled manner | Pass | Fail |
| 3.3 The dog does not use public furniture or public seating | Pass | Fail |
| 3.4 Pick at least three options from the list below to continue with the following assessment questions.Please note: At least one public place and one public passenger vehicle must be chosen, if no taxi is available then the trainer’s car may be used (for example; for rural/remote areas). | Blank | blank |
| Bus | Pass | Fail |
| Train / Tram | Pass | Fail |
| Busway station / interchange or train station | Pass | Fail |
| Café / shopping centre | Pass | Fail |
| Escalator | Pass | Fail |
| Travelator | Pass | Fail |
| Taxi /Car | Pass | Fail |
| Lift | Pass | Fail |
| Other public place/public passenger vehicle used in this public access test (insert details below): | Pass | Fail |
| 3.5 The dog correctly sits in a designated area of chosen transport option, does not try and sit on the seat, and dog enters and exits on command only. The handler is to be in control at all times | Pass | Fail |
| 3.6 The dog maintains a ‘sit’ or ‘down’ position if a person approaches – For example; sits near a table with a child | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: |  |  |
| 4. People response:The dog is passed from front and rear and is non-reactive (for example; does not shy away, growl, raise hackles) in any of the following categories | Blank | blank |
| 4.1 Crowd and pedestrian traffic | Pass | Fail |
| 4.2 Member of public | Pass | Fail |
| 4.3 Approached by adult and child | Pass | Fail |
| 4.4 Does not solicit attention | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: |  |  |
| 5. Dog distraction | Blank | blank |
| 5.1 Dog remains calm (slight anxiety is acceptable if <3 secs). | Pass |  Fail |
| 5.2 Minimal interaction | Pass  | Fail |
| 5.3 Handler has control and dog is responsive to commands | Pass | Fail |
| 5.4 The dog remains controlled while another dog passes | Pass | Fail |
| Notes:  |  |  |
| 6. Noise distractionThe dog is to be subject to noise distractions for example; loud places/vehicles/person’s voice or whistle, or dropping a folder |  |  |
| 6.1 Dog remains calm (slight anxiety or fear is acceptable if <3 secs). | Pass | Fail |
| 6.2 Dog returns to assist handler in a reasonable period of time. | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: |  |  |
| Overall social behaviour Specific comments required regarding how the handler corrects the dog, reassures the dog, control of leash/harness and any undue overcorrection. Include observations about temperament and behaviour | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: |  |  |
| Obedience and Respect |  |  |
| 7. Walk to heel |  |  |
| 7.1 The dog is on the lead throughout the test and walks to heel on left or right of handler, there is to be no straining or pulling on the lead and no soliciting public attention | Pass | Fail |
| 7.2 A two metre recall on lead, dog to come directly back to handler on command | Pass | Fail |
| 7.3 The dog is to be on the lead/harness at all times and if resting, for example; at a café, or public passenger vehicle, or at work, the dog is to be close by to the handler. The dog is not to wander away | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: |  |  |
| Overall obedience and respectInclude specific comments about the handler management of obedience and respect of the dog and the temperament of the dog | Pass | Fail |
| Notes:  |  |  |
| Physical health and appearance |  |  |
| 8. Toileting / hygiene behaviour: |  |  |
| 8.1 The dog presents as clean, well-groomed and healthy |  |  |
| 8.2 The dog is capable of displaying appropriate behaviour |  |  |
| Notes: |  |  |
| 9. Acceptable toileting routine: |  |  |
| 9.1 The dog does not attempt to ‘mark’ over the top of other dogs’ scents | Pass | Fail |
| 9.2 The handler demonstrates knowledge of toileting routine | Pass | Fail |
| 9.3 The dog responds to the ‘toilet on command’ request, which may include taking the dog to a discreet location for toileting purposes | Pass | Fail |
| Notes |  |  |
| Overall health and appearance | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: Include specific comments about the handler’s management of physical health and appearance of the dog | Blank | Blank |
| Specific comments required about veterinary records: | Blank | Blank |
| Assessment results | Blank | Blank |
| Observations made:Include specific comments about temperament of dog and also the role played by:* Primary Handler to physically control the dog, and/or
* Alternative Handler (as applicable) to support the Primary Handler to physically control the dog, at all times and in all situations
 | Blank | Blank |
| Identified concerns | Blank | Blank |
| Overall assessment | Pass | Fail |
| Notes: |  |  |

Authorisation of approved trainer or employee trainer completing this Public Access Test:

Note: a copy of this public assess test must be retained for audit purposes

| Date: | Detail |
| --- | --- |
| Name: | Detail |
| Position: | Detail |
| Signature: | Detail |

Authorisation of representative from an Approved Institution: (if applicable)

| Date: | Detail |
| --- | --- |
| Name: | Detail |
| Position: | Detail |
| Signature: | Detail |

### General Information

* Whilst it is appropriate for a dog to respond/notice noises, people, other dogs etc., the dog must recover and return its attention to assisting the person with a disability in a reasonable period of time, for example; <3 secs.
* In the event of a team failing the Public Access Test (PAT), the next test can be carried out within four weeks. This timeframe gives the team and trainer the opportunity to rectify identified concerns.
* If a guide, hearing or assistance dog fails the PAT or a certified dog can no longer meet the PAT benchmarks, then the approved trainer or approved training institution must inform the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) of this outcome (including any examples of reasons for non-certification) as part of their obligations to provide ongoing support.
* A handler of a certified dog is required to notify their approved trainer or approved training institution of any changes in the dog’s ability to maintain the behavioural standards of the PAT.
* The approved trainer or employee trainer must explain the test to the handler, explaining expectations and what is not acceptable.
* Either party has the right to terminate the test for any health, welfare or safety reasons.
* The standard of behaviour required to pass this test is the standard of behaviour required by the guide, hearing or assistance dog on a day to day basis.
* Under s.25 of the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 it is grounds for immediate suspension or cancellation of approval status if a trainer/training institution intentionally or recklessly certifies a dog as a guide, hearing or assistance dog and the dog has not, or should not have, passed a public access test.
* The trainer/training institution must notify DCCSDS in the event the dog is no longer able to meet the requirements of each element of the Public Access Test.



### Part B – Certification

Certification Details

It is a requirement under the **guide, hearing and assistance dogs act 2009**that a dog be certified by an

Approved trainer / training institution before a handler identity card can be issued by the approved trainer / training institution

| Name of primary handler |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of alternative handler/s (as applicable) | blank |
| Alternative handler 1 |  |
| Alternative handler 2 |  |
| Name of dog |  |
| Breed of dog |  |
| Training institution dog number (if applicable) |  |

Certification means each dog must pass the following criteria:

Please indicate the dog:

| Tick | Is able to perform identifiable physical tasks or behaviours to assist the person in a way that reduces person’s need for support |
| --- | --- |
| Tick | Is not a restricted breed as defined under the animal management (cats and dogs) act 2008 |
| Tick | Is de-sexed and vaccinated |
| Tick | Has not been declared a dangerous dog under local law |
| Tick | Has passed the public access test within seven (7) days of completing this form |
| Tick | Date of public access test: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_ |
| Tick | Date of certification: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_ |

Authorisation for certification

| Name of approved trainer/training institution: | Response |
| --- | --- |
| Name of representative (if applicable) | Response |
| Address of approved trainer/institution | Response |
| Contact phone number | Response |
| Mobile | Response |
| Fax number | Response |
| Email: | Response |
| Signature of representative | Response |
| Date | Response |

If you require further information regarding this document please call 13 qgov (13 74 68) or email the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs team.

Note: trainers: under s. 25 of the guide, hearing and assistance dogs act 2009 it is grounds for immediate suspension or cancellation of approval status if a trainer/training institution intentionally or recklessly certifies a dog as a guide, hearing or assistance dog and the dog has not, or should not have, passed a public access test.

## Part C – Obtaining a handler identity card

Handler Card Details (handler Information is not for public release)

It is a requirement under the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 that a person has a Handler Identity Card to identify themselves as a person who is accompanied by a guide, hearing or assistance dog, certified to access public places, places of accommodation and public passenger vehicles. [Exemption applies where presence of dog poses a risk to the health and welfare of people ordinarily at that place or on that vehicle.] A person may ask an approved trainer or approved training institution to issue a handler’s identity card to the person.

The approved trainer or approved training institution may issue the handler’s identity card to the person if they are satisfied the person is eligible for the card, as either a primary handler, or an alternative handler, as per requirements stated under the GHAADA 2009:

1. for a primary handler’s identity card – where the person with a disability reasonably requires the guide, hearing or assistance dog to reduce the person’s need for support and the person is able to physically control the dog.
2. for an alternative handler’s identity card – where the person is an adult and the primary handler relies on the person to physically control the dog.

Date of request:

Section 1 – Type of request

| This handler Identity Card is required for: | Yes | No |
| --- | --- | --- |
| An initial card |  |  |
| A renewal card |  |  |
| A replacement card (initial card was lost, damaged, stolen) |  |  |
| Primary Handler |  |  |
| Primary Handler [Requires Alternative Handler} |  |  |
| Alternative Handler |  |  |

Section 2 – Handler Information

| Title (Mr / Mrs / Ms / Miss / Dr / other |  |
| --- | --- |
| First Name | Response |
| Surname | Response |
| Preferred Name (if different to first name, for display on the card) | Response |
| Gender (male or female) | Response |
| Telephone number | Response |
| TTY (if available) | Response |
| Email (if available) | Response |
| Mobile number | Response |
| Residential address | Blank |
| Street | Response |
| Suburb | response |
| State and Postcode | Response |
| Postal address: | Blank |
| Street | Response |
| Suburb | Response |
| State and Postcode | Response |

| Third Part Consent | (Person completing the form on behalf of the handler) |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Response |
| Relationship to Handler | Response |
| Contact details |  |
| Telephone | Response |
| Mobile | Response |
| Email | Response |
| Signature | Response |
| Date | response |

Note: Sign off should be by the third party person who has the appropriate authority (Parent / Guardian / Statutory Health Attorney) to sign on behalf o the person with disability – more information available at the Queensland Government Department of Justice and Attorney General [website](https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/justice-services/guardianship?a=71).

(c) Photograph of the guide, hearing or assistance dog – must clearly show head of dog looking directly at the camera

Photographs must also:

* be attached by paper clip or fold-back clips – and not tape, staples, glue or pins
* be printed in colour and high resolution on photo paper
* have been taken no more than 6 months before the date of this Handler Card request
* be between 45mm and 55mm high, and between 35mm and 40mm wide
* show skin tones and have appropriate brightness and contrast
* not contain a flash reflection or red eye effect
* back of photograph must be certified before a person approved under the Statutory Declarations Act 1959 (Cwlth) and include the following information:

| HandlersI certify this is a true likeness of (insert full name) | Response |
| --- | --- |
| Signature(Authorised person) | Response |
| Date | Response |
| Dog (Dogs name) | Response |

## Part D – Checklist

The following checklist must be completed by the approved trainer/training institution before they issue a handler identity card to the primary or alternative handler.

| Part A – Public Access Test passed and completed by approved trainer/training institution and retained for approved trainer/training institution’s records | Yes | No |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Part B – Certification checked and completed by approved trainer/training institution and retained for approved trainer/training institution’s records | Yes | No |
| Part C – Obtaining Handler Identity Card completed with following verified identification sighted and retained for approved trainer/training institution’s records* Handler’s verified photo sighted and retained – stored as .jpeg file
* Photo of the dog sighted and retained – stored as .jpeg file
* Certificate of disability sighted and retained
* Third party consent details recorded for primary handler (if applicable)
* Consent from handler/third party in relation to release of information about the handler, as per the approved trainer/training institution’s privacy policy – to indicate their personal information will not be disclosed to any other third party without Handler’s consent
 | Yes | No |

Copy of completed Part A, B, C and D documentation:

Emailed to the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs team

OR

Posted to:

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs

GPO Box 806

Brisbane QLD 4001

| Checklist completed by: | Blank |
| --- | --- |
| Name of approved trainer / training institution | Blank |
| Name of institution representative (if applicable) | Blank |
| Signature | Blank |
| Date Completed | Blank |

Handler Card Issue Number:

On receipt of Parts A, B, C, and D, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services will forward the Handler Card Issue Number to the approved trainer, who will email the relevant Excel and Jpeg files to Smart Service Queensland (SSQ), to obtain the relevant Handler Identity Card/s.

# Appendix B: Assistance Dogs International Access certification Test

The below ADI Access Test is excerpted from [Assistance Dogs International](https://assistancedogsinternational.org/).

Copyright Assistance Dogs International, Inc. 1997.

| Name of dog and recipient |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name of tester |  | Blank |
| Date of test |  | Blank |
| Date of placement |  | Blank |
| Tested on (please circle or highlight one) | Placement | Follow-up |

Purpose: The purpose of this Public Access Test is to ensure that dogs who have public access are stable, well-behaved, and unobtrusive to the public. It is to ensure that the client has control over the dog and the team is not a public hazard. This test is NOT intended as a substitute for the skill/task test that should be given by the program. It is to be used in addition to those skill/task tests. It is expected that the test will be adhered to as closely as possible. If modifications are necessary, they should be noted in the space provided at the end of the test.

Dismissal: Any dog that displays any aggressive behavior (growling, biting, raising hackles, showing teeth, etc.) will be eliminated from the test. Any dog that eliminates in a building or shows uncontrollable behavior will be eliminated from the test.

Bottom line: The bottom line of this test is that the dog demonstrates that he/she is safe to be in public and that the person demonstrates that he/she has control of the dog at all times.

Testing equipment: All testing shall be done with equipment appropriate to the needs and abilities of the team. All dogs shall be on-lead at all times except in the vehicle at which time it is optional.

This test takes place in a public setting such as a mall where there are a lot of people and natural distractions. The individual will handle the dog and can use any reasonable/humane equipment necessary to ensure his/her control over the dog.

The evaluator will explain the test thoroughly before the actual testing, during which he/she will follow discreetly to observe when not directly interacting with the individual on a test related matter. The only things an evaluator needs are a clip board, an assistant, another dog, a plate with food, and access to a shopping cart.

Commands: Commands may be given to the dog in either hand signals or verbal signals or both.

1. Controlled unload out of vehicle: After a suitable place has been found, the individual will unload the dog and any necessary equipment (wheelchair, walker, crutches, etc.) out of the vehicle. The dog must wait until released before coming out of the vehicle. Once outside, it must wait quietly unless otherwise instructed by the Individual. The dog may not run around, be off lead, or ignore commands given by the individual. Once the team is out of the vehicle and settled, the assistant should walk past with another dog. They should walk within six (6) feet of the team. The Assistance Dog must remain calm and under control, not pulling or trying to get to the other dog. The emphasis on this is that the Assistance Dog remain unobtrusive and is unloaded in the safest manner possible for everyone.
2. Approaching the building: After unloading, the team must maneuver through the parking lot to approach the building. The dog must stay in a relative heel position and may not forge ahead or lag behind. The dog must not display a fear of cars or traffic noises and must display a relaxed attitude. When the individual stops for any reason, the dog must stop also.
3. Controlled entry through a doorway: Once at the doors of the building, the individual may enter however he/she chooses to negotiate the entry safely. Upon entering the building; however, the dog may not wander off or solicit attention from the public. The dog should wait quietly until the team is fully inside then should calmly walk beside the individual. The dog must not pull or strain against the lead or try to push its way past the individual but must wait patiently while entry is completed.
4. Heeling through the building: Once inside the building, the individual and the dog must walk through the area in a controlled manner. The dog should always be within touching distance where applicable or no greater than a foot away from the individual. The dog should not solicit public attention or strain against the lead (except in cases where the dog may be pulling the individual's wheelchair). The dog must readily adjust to speed changes, turn corners promptly, and travel through a crowded area without interacting with the public. In tight quarters, the dog must be able to get out of the way of obstacles and not destroy merchandise by knocking it over or by playing with it.
5. Escalator: Dog steps on and off without being stressed and holds a heel or a side.
6. Elevator: Dog stays in a Block position without bothering the public.
7. Six foot recall on lead: A large, open area should be found for the six foot recall. Once found, the individual will perform a six foot recall with the dog remaining on lead. The individual will sit the dog, leave it, travel six feet, then turn and call the dog to him/her. The dog should respond promptly and not stop to solicit attention from the public or ignore the command. The dog should come close enough to the individual to be readily touched. For Guide Dogs, they must actually touch the person to indicate location. The recall should be smooth and deliberate without the dog trudging to the individual or taking any detours along the way.
8. Sits on command: The team will be asked to demonstrate the Individual's ability to have the dog sit three different times. The dog must respond promptly each time with no more than two commands. There should not be any extraordinary gestures on the part of the people approaching the dog. Normal, reasonable behavior on the part of the people is expected.

The first sit will be next to a plate of food placed upon the ground. The dog must not attempt to eat or sniff the food. The individual may correct the dog verbally or physically away from the food, but then the dog must maintain a sit while ignoring the food. The dog should not be taunted or teased with the food. This situation should be made as realistic as possible.

The second sit will be executed, and the assistant with a shopping cart will approach within three feet of the dog and continue on past. The dog should maintain the sit and not show any fear of the shopping cart. If the dog starts to move, the individual may correct the dog to maintain the sit.

The last sit will be a sit with a stay as a person walks up behind the team, talks to the person and then pets the dog. The dog must hold position. The dog may not break the stay to solicit attention. The individual may repeat the stay command along with reasonable physical corrections.

1. Downs on command: The down exercises will be performed in the same sequence as the sits with the same basic stipulations. The first down will be at a table where food will be dropped on the floor. The dog should not break the down to go for the food or sniff at the food. The individual may give verbal and physical corrections to maintain the down. There should not be any extraordinary gestures on the part of the people approaching the dog. Normal, reasonable behavior from the people is expected.

The second down will be executed, and then an adult and child should approach the dog. The dog should maintain the down and not solicit attention. If the child pets the dog, the dog must behave appropriately and not break the stay. The individual may give verbal and physical corrections if the dog begins to break the stay.

1. Noise distraction: The team will be heeling along and the tester will drop a clipboard to the ground behind the team. The dog may acknowledge the noise, but may not in any way show aggression or fear. A normal startle reaction is fine--the dog may jump and or turn--but the dog should quickly recover and continue along on the heel. The dog should not become aggressive, begin shaking, etc.
2. Restaurant: The team and tester should enter a restaurant and be seated at a table. The dog should go under the table or, if size prevents that, stay close by the individual. The dog must sit or lie down and may move a bit for comfort during the meal, but should not be up and down a lot or need a lot of correction or reminding. This would be a logical place to do the food drop during a down. (See number 7).
3. Off lead: Sometime during the test, where appropriate, the person will be instructed to drop the leash while moving so it is apparent to the dog. The individual must show the ability to maintain control of the dog and get the leash back in its appropriate position. This exercise will vary greatly depending on the person's disabilities. The main concern is that the dog be aware that the leash is dropped and that the person is able to maintain control of the dog and get the leash back into proper position.
4. Controlled unit: The team will leave the building in a similar manner to entering, with safety and control being of prime importance. The team will proceed across the parking lot and back to the vehicle. The dog must be in appropriate heel position and not display any fear of vehicle or traffic sounds.
5. Controlled load into vehicle: The individual will load the dog into the vehicle, with either entering first. The dog must not wander around the parking lot but must wait patiently for instructions. Emphasis is on safety and control.

Scoring Factors of the Public Access Certification Test

| A = Always | M = Most of the time (more than half of time) |
| --- | --- |
| S – Some of the time (half or less of the time) | N = Never |

Controlled unload out of vehicle: Dog did not try to leave vehicle until given release command.

| Yes | No | The dog waited in the vehicle until released.\* |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | The dog waited outside the vehicle under control |
| Yes | No | The dog remained under control while another dog was walked past |

**Approaching the building:** Relative heel position, not straining or forging

| A | M | S | N | The dog stayed in relative heel position |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog was calm around traffic.\* |
| A | M | S | N | The dog stopped when the individual came to a halt |

Controlled entry through a doorway

| Yes | No | The dog waited quietly at the door until commanded to enter.\* |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | The dog waited on the inside until able to return to heel position.\* |

Heeling through the building

| A | M | S | N | The dog was within the prescribed distance of the individual |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | M | S | N | The dog ignored the public, remaining focused on the individual |
| A | M | S | N | The dog readily adjusted to speed changes |
| A | M | S | N | The dog readily turned corners--did not have to be tugged or jerked to change direction |
| A | M | S | N | The dog readily maneuvered through tight quarters |

Escalator

| Yes | No | The dog steps on and off without being stressed and holds a heel or a side |
| --- | --- | --- |

Elevator

| Yes | No | The dog stays in a Block position without bothering the public. |
| --- | --- | --- |

Six foot recall on lead

| Yes | No | The dog responded readily to the recall command--did not stray away, seek attention from others, or trudge slowly.\* |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | The dog remained under control and focused on the individual.\* |
| Yes | No | The dog came within the prescribed distance of the individual.\* |
| Yes | No | The dog came directly to the individual.\* |

Sits on command

| A | M | S | N | The dog responded promptly to the command to sit |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog remained under control around food - not trying to get food and not needing repeated corrections.\* |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog remained composed while the shopping cart passed - did not shy away, show signs of fear, etc. shopping cart should be pushed normally and reasonable, not dramatically.\* |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog maintained a sit-stay while being petted by a stranger.\* |

Downs on command

| A | M | S | N | The dog responded promptly to the command to down |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog remained under control around food-not trying to get food and not needing repeated corrections.\* |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog remained in control while the child approached - child should not taunt dog or be overly dramatic. |

Noise distractions: If the dog jumps, turns, or shows a quick startle type reaction, that is fine. The dog should not show fear, aggression, or continue to be affected by the noise.

| Yes | No | The dog remained composed during the noise distraction.\* |
| --- | --- | --- |

Restaurant

| Yes | No | The dog is unobtrusive and out of the way of patrons and employees as much as possible.\* |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | The dog maintained proper behavior, ignoring food and being quiet.\* |

Off – lead

| Yes | No | When told to drop the leash, the team maintained control and the individual got the leash back in position.\* |
| --- | --- | --- |

Dog taken by another person: To show that the dog can be handled by another person without aggression or excessive stress or whining, someone else will take the dog's leash and passively hold the dog (not giving any commands) while the dog's partner moves 20' away.

| Yes | No | Another person can take the dog's leash and the dog's partner can move away without aggression or undue stress on the part of the dog |
| --- | --- | --- |

Controlled exit

| A | M | S | N | The dog stayed in relative heel position. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog was calm around traffic.\* |
| A | M | S | N | The dog stopped when the individual came to a halt. |

Controlled load into vehicle

| Yes | No | The dog waited until commanded to enter the vehicle |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | The dog readily entered the vehicle upon command. |

Team leadership

| A | M | S | N | When the dog did well, the person praised the dog |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yes | No | blank | blank | The dog is relaxed, confident, and friendly |
| A | M | S | N | The person kept the dog under control |

Scoring:

The team must score all 'Always' or' Most of the time' responses on the A-M-S-N parts of the test. The team must score at least 80% "yes" answers on the "yes" "no" portion of the test.

\*All questions marked by an asterisk must be answered by a "YES" response.

Were there any unique situations that made any portion of this test not applicable?

# Appendix C: Assistance Dogs International

Minimum standards for certification of owner/private trainer trained assistance dog teams

These are intended to be minimum standards for all assistance dog programs that are Members or Candidates of ADI. All programs are encouraged to work at levels above the minimums.

1. The owner must go through all the program requirements for an assistance dog applicant which includes the programs application process and team training. The owner must sign all consent and release of liability forms provided by the program.
2. The dog must meet all ADI Minimum Standards for dogs and must meet the same program standards as the dogs trained and placed by the program staff.
3. The program should have a minimum of a 6 month period working with the owner and their dog. The owner and dog will be observed in a variety of settings and situations during this time. This will also include any training necessary to complete the program and meet the ADI Minimum Standards.
4. The program will inform the owner prior to acceptance into the program of all financial commitments/fees required by the program. The program will also inform the owner that at any time throughout the process or after certification testing, the program can decide to discharge the dog because of temperament, health or training issues.
5. The program will decide when the team is ready to go through the team training process.
6. After successfully completing the team training process and the program requirements the team will be given program certification. This certification will include a program identification card and harness or other id used by the program.
7. The team becomes a program team for the working life of the dog. The program will include the team in all requirements and activities in place for teams made up of program trained dogs, including but not limited to follow-up, retesting, and continuity of dog’s health care and veterinary requirements.
8. The service, hearing, or guide dogs must meet the minimum standards for training each type of assistance dog. A facility dog must meet the minimum standards for facility dogs.
9. The assistance dog team must meet all of the standards as laid out in the minimum standards for Dogs in Public and the dog should be equally well behaved in the home.
10. The assistance dog must be trained to perform at least 3 tasks to mitigate the client’s disability.
11. The client must be provided with enough instruction to be able to meet the ADI Minimum Standards for Assistance Dogs in Public. The client must be able to demonstrate:
* that their dog can perform at least 3 tasks
* knowledge of acceptable training techniques
* an understanding of canine care and health
* the ability to maintain training, problem solve, and continue to train/add new skills(as required) with their service dog
* knowledge of local access laws and appropriate public behaviour
1. The assistance dog program must document monthly follow ups with these teams for the first 6 months following placement. Personal contact will be done by qualified staff or program volunteer within 12 months of graduation and annually thereafter.
2. Identification of the assistance dog will be accomplished with the laminated ID card with a photo(s) and names of the dog and partner. In public the dog must wear a cape, harness, backpack, or other similar piece of equipment or clothing with a logo that is clear and easy to read and identifiable as an assistance dog.
3. The program staff must demonstrate knowledge of the owner’s disabilities in relation to the services they provide. The program shall make available to staff and volunteers educational material on different disabilities.
4. The owner/partner must abide by the ADI Minimum Standards of Assistance Dog Partners.
5. Prior to the completion of training and certification testing, the assistance dog must meet the ADI Standards and Ethics Regarding Dogs, be spayed/neutered and have current vaccination certificates as determined by their veterinarian and applicable laws and be microchipped.

# Appendix D: Queensland Government Assistance Dog Trainer guidelines

Suitability for approval as a trainer/training institution

The Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 (the Act) sets out clear criteria on whether a person or entity is suitable for approval as an approved trainer or training institution. A trainer will be assessed by experienced technical assessors as suitable for approval if they are able to:

* train reliable guide, hearing or assistance dogs that are:
	+ able to perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours for the benefit of a person with a disability; and
	+ safe and effective in public places, public passenger vehicles, or places of accommodation;
* select dogs that are able to meet the individual needs of a person with a disability;
* provide ongoing and regular support to the handlers of trained guide, hearing or assistance dogs;
* demonstrate recognised qualifications/experience in dog training and disability studies;
* show membership of recognised guide hearing or assistance dog industry body for example; International Guide Dog Federation, Assistance Dogs International;
* maintain sound record keeping procedures;
* maintain policies and procedures for confidentiality, privacy and complaints; and
* return positive history screening results to demonstrate they are safe to work with people with disability.

Public Access Test

A significant component of certifying a guide, hearing or assistance dog under the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 (the Act) is the successful completion of a Public Access Test. The Public Access Test establishes a minimum standard for guide, hearing and assistance dogs to be certified under the Act. The Public Access Test aims to meet the objectives of the Act and is designed to assess if a guide, hearing or assistance dog is:

* safe and effective in a public place, public passenger vehicle, or place of accommodation; and
* able to be controlled by –
	+ the primary handler of the dog; or
	+ the primary handler of the dog with support of an alternative handler.

The Public Access Test can only be conducted by a trainer, or an employee trainer of a training institution approved under the Act. In order for a prospective handler to be issued with a handler’s identity card, their dog must pass a Public Access Test within seven days of the dog being certified.

Certification of guide, hearing and assistance dogs

It is a requirement under the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009 that a dog be certified by an approved trainer or training institution before a handler’s identity card can be issued by the approved trainer or training institution. Certification means each dog must pass the following criteria:

* is able to perform identifiable physical tasks or behaviours to assist the person in a way that reduces their need for support
* has passed the Public Access Test conducted by the approved trainer or training institution within seven days before being certified
* is not a restricted dog as defined under the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008
* is desexed and vaccinated
* has not been declared a dangerous dog under a local law.

Once a dog has passed the Public Access Test and meets the other eligibility requirements set out under the Act, the approved trainer or training institution can certify the dog.

# Appendix E: Assistance Dogs International Ethics for Dogs

ADI believes that any dog the member organizations trains to become an Assistance Dog has a right to a quality life. Therefore, the ethical use of an Assistance Dog must incorporate the following criteria:

1. An Assistance Dog must be temperamentally screened for emotional soundness and working ability.
2. An Assistance Dog must be physically screened for the highest degree of good health and physical soundness.
3. An Assistance Dog must be technically and analytically trained for maximum control and for the specialized tasks he/she is asked to perform.
4. An Assistance Dog must be trained using humane training methods providing for the physical and emotional safety of the dog.
5. An Assistance Dog must be permitted to learn at his/her own individual pace and not be placed in service before reaching adequate physical and emotional maturity.
6. An Assistance Dog must be matched to best suit the client’s needs, abilities and lifestyle.
7. An Assistance Dog must be placed with a client able to interact with him/her.
8. An Assistance Dog must be placed with a client able to provide for the dog’s emotional, physical and financial needs.
9. An Assistance Dog must be placed with a client able to provide a stable and secure living environment.
10. An Assistance Dog must be placed with a client who expresses a desire for increased independence and/or an improvement in the quality of his/her life through the use of an Assistance Dog.
11. An ADI member organization will accept responsibility for its dogs in the event of a graduate’s death or incapacity to provide proper care.

An ADI member organization will not train, place, or certify dogs with any aggressive behavior. An assistance dog may not be trained in any way for guard or protection duty. Non-aggressive barking as a trained behavior will be acceptable in appropriate situations.