

Industry Handbook



Industry Handbook

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Companion Card® is a registered trade mark of the State of Victoria.

Further information and copies of the Victorian Companion Card Industry Handbook are available from the Companion Card web site at:

www.companioncard.org.au

or telephone the
Companion Card Information Line on:

1800 650 611

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Removing Barriers for People with a Disability

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

Venue and activity owners and operators are already required to comply with existing disability anti-discrimination legislation, including the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth), and should be familiar with these provisions.

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

Many government and non-government organisations have developed a Disability Action Plan and registered them with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). An organisation's Action Plan is taken into account by the Commission in the event of a complaint being lodged by a member of the public.

All Victorian Government Departments will soon be developing Disability Action Plans, consistent with the Disability Discrimination Act, and all venue and activity owners and operators are also strongly encouraged to do so.

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

More information on Disability Action Plans can be obtained from HREOC (see Additional Resources).

Description of Terms

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

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

“Affiliate” – is used to describe organisations, businesses and outlets that charge an admission or participation fee, and have officially registered that they will accept the Companion Card. Victorian-based industries, including those with national operations or outlets, are eligible to become affiliates.

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

Why has the Companion Card been developed?

The Victorian Network On Recreation and Disability (VICNORD) developed the concept of a Companion Card in response to continued concern from people with a disability, who found the pricing policies of many entertainment, leisure and recreation venues/activities to be discriminatory.

People with a disability, who are unable to attend community venues and activities without attendant care support, have a right to equal participation in the community.

This fundamental right is protected under section 42 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) and section 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth). Both these Acts make it unlawful to discriminate against a person who requires the assistance of a companion.

In the past, a person with a disability who needed attendant care type support from a companion in order to participate at most venues/activities in the community, has sometimes been required to pay two admission and/or booking fees; one for themselves and one for their companion.

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

A number of venue/activity operators have attempted to address this inequity and have allowed free admission for companions. To date, however, these organisations have not had a simple or consistent method of identifying who may legitimately require a companion.

The Companion Card has been developed to promote the existing right of people with a disability to fair ticketing. It is not a new responsibility; nor is it a discount scheme,

concession or benefit. It is intended to be a tool to assist the business and community sectors to identify people who require attendant care support from a companion.

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

The Companion Card is a Victorian-based initiative, however the community and business sectors in other states should be mindful of their obligations under the discrimination laws of their own state, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth).

The Companion Card is a not for profit program. Administration of the program is funded by the Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund, Strategic Initiatives Fund.

An Industry Affiliation Form for organisations wishing to affiliate with the Companion Card program can be found in the sleeve at the back of this handbook. It is recommended that you keep this handbook in case you need to refer to it later.





What is the Companion Card?

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

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

The Companion Card promotes an existing right for people with a significant, permanent disability to participate at venues/activities in the community, without incurring an additional cost because they require a companion to provide attendant care support. It is not a concession or discount scheme, nor does it give people with a disability a benefit that others do not receive.

“The safest and easiest way to protect your organisation from accusations of discrimination is to provide an additional ticket at no extra cost to the holder of a Companion Card”

- Australian Entertainment Industry Association (AEIA)
Companion Card and Discrimination Guidelines for AEIA Members, August 28, 2002

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

All operators need to comply with all aspects of existing disability anti-discrimination legislation. Where current barriers exist for people with a disability, strategies should be implemented including the provision of ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, appropriate signage, captioning and provision of Auslan (Australian sign language) interpreters, to address these barriers.

It is recommended that all organisations develop a Disability Action Plan in order to ensure their services are accessible.

Who will Companion Cards be issued to?

The Companion Card is for people with a significant, permanent disability, who are unable to participate at most available community venues and activities without a companion to provide attendant care type support, for the rest of their life.

Attendant care type support includes significant assistance required with mobility, communication, self-care, or learning, planning and thinking, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies do not enable the person to carry out these tasks independently. It does not include providing only reassurance, social company or encouragement.

Card applicants must meet strict criteria developed by the Victorian Department of Human Services. Each application must be signed by a relevant professional who can confirm the details provided by the individual applying. It is an offence under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) for either the applicant or the professional to provide false information in an application.

Applications are lodged with the Companion Card program for verification. Applicants agree to the Companion Card Cardholder Terms and Conditions, which outline entitlements, obligations and appropriate use of the card.

In summary, Companion Cards will be issued to applicants who can demonstrate that they;

1. Live in Australia, or reside in Australia under a valid visa; and
2. Have a significant, permanent disability; and
3. Are unable to participate at most community venues or activities without a companion to provide attendant care support; and
4. Will need a companion for the rest of their life.

The Companion Card will only be issued to people who meet **all** the criteria for the program.

There may be circumstances whereby a person may require a companion but may not qualify to receive a Companion Card. Examples include: a person experiencing a temporary disability; a person whose expected development or recovery may mean that they will not require a companion in the future; or a person who is affected by the specific inaccessibility of a particular venue. In situations such as these, it is up to the individual and the venue/activity operators to negotiate an alternative method to verify the need for companion access.

What is industry affiliation?

Affiliates are organisations, events or activities that officially register to participate in the Companion Card program. In summary, affiliates agree to;

- Issue a Companion Ticket at no charge to cardholders who require a companion to provide attendant care support to participate at their venue/activity; and
- Display the Companion Card logo in a prominent position and/or in promotional material, where possible; and
- Abide by the Victorian Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions outlined in this handbook.

How much does it cost to affiliate?

Affiliation with the Companion Card program is free. Administration of the program is funded by the Victorian State Government through the Community Support Fund, Strategic Initiatives Fund.



Why should organisations affiliate?

“The Companion Card is an excellent way of meeting some of the obligations service providers have under the existing legislation”.

Susan Halliday
Acting Federal Disability Discrimination Commissioner
1999 - 2000
Companion Card Venue Forum
6th December 2000

Some of the benefits of affiliation are:

- Affiliation will present a positive public image for your organisation.
- You will be meeting your social responsibility by incorporating the human rights of people with a disability into your ticketing policies and practices.
- You will have access to an additional, untapped target market.
- The Companion Card, if adopted by a venue/activity, provides evidence that the organisation has taken some initial steps to remove discriminatory policies or practices. (Note: it would assist organisations to demonstrate this by implementing a range of policies to ensure accessibility of their venues).
- Becoming an affiliate is an easy way to help you prevent complaints of discrimination being lodged against you with the Equal Opportunity Commission.

“The Commission does consider information about what current industry practice is and it does also look at what best practice is in deciding whether a complaint has substance.

So, for example if some venues or event managers were able to provide for the Companion Card this would be taken into consideration when deciding other complaints”.

Dr. Diane Sisely, Chief Executive,
Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria
Companion Card Venue Forum Report
6th December 2000

Who should affiliate?

The Companion Card program was developed with an initial focus on Victorian recreation, leisure, social and cultural venues/activities, but is open to participation by other industries. Victorian-based industries, including those with national operations or outlets, are eligible to become affiliates.

The disability anti-discrimination legislation applies to all organisations, regardless of their size, or the type of service provided. If you charge an admission or participation fee for your service, you should consider affiliating with the Companion Card program.

It is important to remember that the disability anti-discrimination legislation applies to your organisation regardless of whether or not you are a registered affiliate of the Companion Card program.

Removing or reducing discrimination is a shared responsibility for which more than one party may be liable. It may be beneficial for organisations to affiliate with the Companion Card even if they are not directly involved in issuing tickets or monitoring admissions. For example, a venue owner may affiliate with the program and make it a condition of venue use that all service providers operating from the venue comply with Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions. Similarly, a funding body may affiliate and make it a condition of funding that all grant recipients comply with Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions.

“... it must be remembered that responsibility for removing or reducing discrimination is a shared responsibility. To effect this, complainants under the Equal Opportunity Act can lodge a complaint against two or more persons or legal entities if he or she believes that they are jointly responsible for the alleged discriminatory treatment.....”

“For example if a complaint is made about lack of access to an event, the event promoter, the venue manager and the venue owner might all be named as respondents to a complaint and all might be individually and/or jointly liable.”

Dr. Diane Sisely, Chief Executive,
Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria
Companion Card Venue Forum Report
6th December 2000

Many venue and event operators have been involved in the development of the Companion Card program. Whilst the Companion Card is a Victorian-based initiative, interstate organisations may also need to consider how they will comply with relevant legislation.

How to affiliate

Complete the Industry Affiliation Form and send it to the Companion Card program. You will be officially registered as an affiliate on the Companion Card database, and you will be sent a range of promotional materials and details regarding the Companion Card security features. You can find an Industry Affiliation Form:

- In the back sleeve of this handbook
- On the Companion Card web site at www.companioncard.org.au
- By telephoning the Companion Card Information Line on **1800 650 611** to request a form to be posted to you.

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

It is not necessary for organisations with multiple outlets or locations that trade under the same name (eg. a chain of cinemas), to list every location on the Industry Affiliation Form.

Promotional materials

When you register with the Companion Card program, you will be sent a range of promotional materials (such as logos and point of sale materials). Where possible, affiliates are requested to display the Companion Card logo in a prominent position at ticketing outlets or business premises and/or on promotional material.

You can also create a link from your organisation's web site to the Companion Card web site, to provide information about the program to your customers.

Telephone the Companion Card Information Line to obtain details of the range of resources available or to place an order for additional promotional materials.



What if an organisation chooses not to affiliate?

Organisations are not obliged to affiliate with the Companion Card program. They do, however, need to be mindful of their obligations under the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth). The Companion Card is a tool that can be easily adopted by venues and activities to assist with compliance. However, organisations may prefer to implement their own strategy to comply with the relevant legislation.

“Choosing not to implement change strategies and processes that allow for equality of opportunity and equitable access may well be far more expensive than the implementation of the change process.

This is particularly so if one factors in that both product image and company reputation are at stake as well as legal fees and possible compensatory damages.

Some think about the Companion Card as “losing one seat”, but without it the new client wouldn’t otherwise be there, occupying a seat”.

Susan Halliday
Acting Federal Disability Discrimination Commissioner
1999 - 2000
Companion Card Venue Forum
6th December 2000

Withdrawing your affiliation

There is no expiry date for affiliation; it is ongoing. If a venue/activity decides, after affiliating with the program, that they no longer wish to accept the Companion Card, they should write to the Companion Card program stating their intention to withdraw their affiliation. The organisation will then be removed from the Companion Card affiliate database. It is important to remember that the disability anti-discrimination legislation applies to your organisation regardless of whether or not you are a registered affiliate.

Misuse of the Companion Card

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

Some features of this process include:

1. All applicants must have a relevant professional sign their application form to declare that the information on the application form is correct. The professionals that can sign a Companion Card Application Form are drawn from:
 - A small group of specialist Health Professionals that are deemed to be suitable to assess applicants against the eligibility requirements for the Companion Card. These professionals are specified in the Companion Card Cardholder Application Form.
 - Program Managers of a small group of specialist services that have eligibility requirements matching those of the Companion Card program. These services are specified in the Companion Card Cardholder Application Form.

2. It is an offence under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), for the applicant or professional to provide false or misleading information in an application.
3. All applications are verified.
4. Companion Cards are printed with an expiry date on the bottom right hand corner. After this period all cardholders will need to renew their card. The renewal period is based on:
 - The physical life expectancy (wear and tear) of the card;
 - The requirement for photographs to remain reflective of the cardholder’s appearance;
 - The potential for change in the support requirements for some cardholders.

The Companion Card incorporates the same polymer technology that is used to produce Australia’s “plastic” banknotes. This makes the card virtually impossible to accurately reproduce. The Companion Card program is the first in Australia to utilise this technology to provide advanced forgery protection for a card that is intended for public circulation.

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

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

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

If affiliates have a complaint regarding alleged misuse of a Companion Card, they should note the card details, if possible, and lodge the complaint directly with the Companion Card program, which will investigate the report.



Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions

1. Affiliates understand that the Companion Card will only be used when the cardholder requires the assistance of a companion to participate at a particular venue/activity.

2. The minimum expectation of Companion Card affiliates is that they will issue cardholders with one Companion Ticket, or admission, at no charge. This ticket will be exempt from all booking fees.

3. Where a cardholder needs more than one companion to provide the attendant care support, the cardholder will negotiate this with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.

4. The Companion Card can be used to obtain a Companion Ticket for any programs, services and sessions run by affiliated venue/activity operators. This will be subject to the usual admission availability and conditions.

5. Booking and ticket distribution practices for Companion Tickets should not be more difficult than the standard ticketing practices of the affiliated venue/activity.

6. The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards.

7. The venue/activity must ensure cardholders are able to be seated or located physically close to their companions. Companions will remain close to cardholders to assist them as required. Cardholders with specific seating requirements will inform the venue/activity at the time of booking.

8. Some venue/activity operators may charge for participation over and above general admission costs (e.g. a fee for rides in addition to an entry fee at a fun park). Affiliated venue/activity operators must issue a Companion Ticket for both admission, and for additional components such as rides etc., if the cardholder requires assistance in order to participate.

9. Companion Cards may be used to purchase a package deal for the cardholder that combines admission costs with ancillary components such as meals etc. When taking a booking for a package deal, affiliates should provide details of what is included with the Companion Ticket. It is essential that the companion's support to the cardholder is not disrupted if the ancillary components are not included in the Companion Ticket. For example, if meals are not included, the companion must be able to bring or access food in a manner that enables them to provide continual support to the cardholder.

10. Affiliated venues/activities agree to, where possible, display the Companion Card logo in a prominent position at their business premises or ticketing outlet, and in promotional material.

11. Only the person whose photograph and details appear on the Companion Card can use the card.

12. Companion Tickets cannot be used without the Companion Card cardholder being present.

13. Companion Card cardholders must inform the venue/activity of their requirement for a Companion Ticket at the time they book or purchase their own ticket.

14. Acceptance of the Companion Card does not indicate that the venue/activity is accessible. Cardholders will be advised to check accessibility with the venue/activity before booking tickets.

15. Cardholders must provide their Companion Card details when making telephone bookings, and must present their valid card during ticket collection and at any time when asked during the activity. If cardholders cannot present their card, they may be charged for the Companion Ticket.

16. If a venue/activity suspects a Companion Card is being misused, they can report this to the Companion Card program, which will investigate the report. Proven misuse of the Companion Card may result in card cancellation, and the cardholder being ineligible to reapply.

17. It is understood that venue/activity operators and organisations agree to and accept the Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions when they submit the Industry Affiliation Form.

Getting more information about the Companion Card

The Companion Card web site

www.companioncard.org.au

This web site provides a range of information about the Companion Card program, translations of key information, answers to frequently asked questions, and links to other useful web sites.

Copies of this handbook, the Industry Affiliation Form, and a range of other Companion Card forms can also be downloaded from the web site.

Recorded Information Lines

Recorded information is available 24 hours per day. The Recorded Information Lines provide a summary of the program and answers to frequently asked questions for potential cardholders, in various languages.

For recorded information in English telephone **1300 305 620**.

For recorded information in languages other than English, telephone the relevant Multilingual Information Line. (See details on the opposite page).

The Companion Card Information Line

The Companion Card Information Line staff are available during business hours to respond to queries regarding the Companion Card program and can also assist you with questions regarding the Industry Affiliation Form.

Copies of this handbook, the Industry Affiliation Form, and a range of other Companion Card forms can be obtained by contacting the Companion Card Information Line. Telephone **1800 650 611** (English speaking)

If you do not speak English, you can connect to the Companion Card Information Line with the assistance of an interpreter by telephoning the relevant Multilingual Information Line. (See details on the opposite page).

If you are Deaf, have a hearing impairment, or have complex communication needs, and you would like to access the Companion Card Information Line, please telephone:

- The Companion Card TTY on **1800 898 888**, or
- The National Relay Service on **13 36 77**, or
- The Speech-to-Speech Relay Service on **1300 555 727**.

Ask to be connected to the Companion Card Information Line on **1800 650 611**.

Multilingual Information Lines

The Multilingual Information Lines provide potential cardholders with recorded information regarding the Companion Card 24 hours per day. They can also connect both card applicants and industry stakeholders to interpreters to speak with the Companion Card Information Line during business hours.

Multilingual Information Line Telephone Numbers

Amharic	1300 305 601
Arabic	1300 305 602
Cantonese	1300 305 603
Croatian	1300 305 604
Greek	1300 305 607
Italian	1300 305 608
Macedonian	1300 305 609
Mandarin	1300 305 610
Polish	1300 305 612
Russian	1300 305 613
Serbian	1300 305 614
Somali	1300 305 615
Spanish	1300 305 616
Turkish	1300 305 617
Vietnamese	1300 305 618
Other Languages	1300 305 619



Additional Resources

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

Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria (EOCV)

EOCV provides information about equal opportunity rights and responsibilities through its Advice Line and helps people resolve complaints of unlawful discrimination or harassment through its conciliation service. These services are impartial, confidential and free.

EOCV also offers a wide range of general and tailored education courses to help businesses and organisations ensure they are better equipped to deal with their responsibilities under equal opportunity laws.

Telephone: (03) 9281 7111

Toll free: 1800 134 142

TTY: (03) 9281 7110

Facsimile: (03) 9281 7171

Web site: www.eoc.vic.gov.au

E-mail: eoc@vicnet.net.au

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

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

Telephone: (02) 9284 9600

Web site: www.humanrights.gov.au

General enquiries and publications:
1300 369 711

TTY: 1800 620 241

Facsimile: (02) 9284 9611

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

Peak Industry Bodies

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

Disability Online web site

www.disability.vic.gov.au

Disability Online provides comprehensive information including:

- A Victorian directory of disability-related services,
- An events calendar,
- The latest disability-related news,
- Disability and health related articles
- A portal into other useful disability-related web sites to use as a resource for further high-quality information.

Privacy

The information supplied to the Companion Card program will be recorded and stored in a database and used for the purposes of administering the Companion Card program and, where consent is given, for evaluation purposes. Information collected can be accessed via a Freedom Of Information request.

You will not be sent any material that is not directly related to the Companion Card program. The information will not be shared, used or disclosed to anyone who is not involved in the administration, implementation or evaluation of the program.

The information supplied will be handled in accordance with the privacy principles contained in the Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic), and the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic).

For more information about privacy, you can refer to:

- The Health Services Commissioner
www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/
- The Privacy Commissioner for Victoria
www.privacy.vic.gov.au





The Companion Card Industry Affiliation Form should be located in the sleeve opposite.

Please do not use a photocopied affiliation form. You can also download the Companion Card Industry Affiliation Form from the Companion Card web site.

www.companioncard.org.au

Or telephone the Companion Card Information Line to request a form to be posted to you:

Telephone: 1800 650 611

TTY: 1800 898 888

National Relay Service: 13 36 77

**Speech-to-Speech Relay Service:
1300 555 727**

The Department of Human Services would like to acknowledge the many individuals, community groups, businesses and industry peak bodies that have contributed to the development and implementation of the Companion Card program.



Accepted Here

www.companioncard.org.au