

EPILEPSY FACT SHEET

Service Dogs



What is a Service Dog?

A Service Dog is a dog specially trained to be able to help people with disabilities with everyday activities, alerting or responding to seizures, and other tasks. Under the *Service Dogs Act*, which came into effect in Alberta on January 1, 2009, a person carrying the Service Dog Team Identification Card **cannot legally be denied access** to restaurants, shops, taxis, or any other place where the general public is allowed.

How can a Service Dog Help Someone with Epilepsy?

There are two types of Service Dogs that can help a person with epilepsy:

- Seizure Response Dogs
- Seizure Alert Dogs.

A Seizure Response Dog can help someone once they have had a seizure. They can help by barking to alert those nearby in the case of a seizure, or if indoors, to go get another person. The dogs will stay with the person, and can provide a comforting and orienting presence to those who are confused or upset after the seizure is over. They can also fetch the phone or other useful objects for a person who needs help.

A Seizure Alert Dog can sense that their owner is about to have a seizure and warn the person. This can help you avoid dangerous situations because you know beforehand that a seizure will happen. For some people, it is possible to take abortive medications to stop the seizure from happening. This warning may also give a person with epilepsy a feeling of liberty and control because they will know when a seizure is coming. It is unknown how Seizure Alert Dogs are able to tell that a seizure is coming, and it is only approximately 10% of dogs that are able to do so. Seizure Alert Dogs can also perform all the same actions to respond to a seizure that Seizure Response Dogs do.

All Service Dogs can help a person with epilepsy create a social bridge between themselves and others. A dog is often a good conversation starter, and can help others see a person with a dog rather than a person with epilepsy. Additionally, pets in general are known for improving a person's quality of life and stress levels, which in turn can reduce seizures that are triggered by stress.

What is the Etiquette when Encountering a Service Dog?

A Service Dog is not a pet. These dogs are workers. When encountering a Service Dog of any kind, you should not pet, offer food to, speak to, or make noises at the dog unless given permission by the owner. This is because these dogs are in "working" mode. Giving them extra attention may distract them from doing their job and helping their owner. Don't feel bad for these dogs. They are bred and trained to work, and enjoy it!

How Can I get a Seizure Alert or Seizure Response Dog?

The *Service Dogs Act* applies only to dogs that are accredited by Assistance Dogs International, Inc. The only organization in Canada that trains and places Seizure Dogs is Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides. They only train Seizure Response Dogs. To qualify for their program, the person applying for the dog must be at least 12 years of age, have at least two seizures per month, have complete cognitive function and be able to handle the dog totally independently. Also, there cannot be any other dogs living in the home where the Seizure Dog will be living.

The process you must follow if you wish to be paired with a Seizure Response Dog by Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides begins by submitting an application. A dog trainer will come to the home to do a home assessment. If a person accepted into the program, they will be placed on a waiting list until a suitable dog match is found. This can be a long wait. Once the person has been matched with a dog, they and their caregiver will travel to the Dog Guides location in Oakville, Ontario for a three week training session with the dog. All costs, including return transportation to Oakville are covered by the Lions Foundation. Although the dogs are worth \$25,000, the Foundation provides them free of charge.

The recipient is responsible for food, veterinary bills, and other required care once the dog is placed. You are also responsible for practicing trained behaviours with your dog. If you stop working with your dog, it will stop responding to seizures.

How Do I Certify My Dog as a Service Dog if it Was Not Trained at an ADI Accredited School?

Go to <https://www.alberta.ca/service-dog-upgrade-training.aspx> for information on upgrade training for dogs (including those not accredited by Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI)”) and to download an application. The first part of the application form will be used to refer you and your dog to the Service Dogs Testing Project. If you successfully complete the public safety challenge test, you will be recommended for the Service Dog Team Identification Card.

For More Information:

Lions Foundation of Canada
Dog Guides

Website:
<http://www.dogguides.com>
Email: info@dogguides.com
Telephone: 1-800-768-3030

Service Dog Assessment Team
Community and Social Services

Website:
<https://www.alberta.ca/service-dog-information.aspx>
Email: servicedogs@gov.ab.ca
Phone: 310-0000 to call toll-free,
When prompted dial (780) 427-9136

Assistance Dogs International Inc.

Website:
<http://www.assistedogsinternational.org>
Email: [in-fo@assistedogsinternational.org](mailto:info@assistedogsinternational.org)
Telephone: (707) 571-0427

The Epilepsy Association of Calgary
316, 4014 Macleod Trail S.E.
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epilepsycalgary.com

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