

ACT COMPANION CARD

Cardholder Handbook

Supported by:
ACT Government and ACT Blits

About this handbook

This handbook can assist you to understand how the Companion Card program works and whether you should apply for a Companion Card.

You should read this handbook before completing the application form.

We recommend that you keep this handbook in case you need to refer to it later.

Description of terms

Cardholder - is a person with disability, whose application for a Companion Card has been successful, and whose photograph and details appear on a Companion Card.

Companion - is used to describe a paid or unpaid assistant or carer who provides attendant care support to a cardholder, which enables the cardholder to participate at most community venues or activities.

Affiliate - is used to describe an organisation, business or outlet that charges an admission or participation fee, and has officially registered that it will accept the Companion Card.

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 support in order to participate at a venue or activity

Attendant care support - this includes significant assistance with mobility, communication, self-care, or learning where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies do not enable the person to carry out these tasks independently.

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About the Companion Card

The Companion Card enables people with disability who require lifelong attendant care support from a companion to participate at most venues and activities to do so without incurring the cost of a second ticket for their companion. The program aims to:

- support greater social inclusion for people with a disability and their carers
- provide businesses with a practical way to meet some of their obligations under anti-discrimination legislation.

Cardholders present their card when booking or purchasing a ticket from a participating business. Participating businesses will recognise the Companion Card and issue the cardholder with a second 'companion ticket' for their companion at no charge. The companion ticket is also exempt from all booking fees.

The program is not a discount scheme, concession or benefit.

Note: Acceptance of the Companion Card does not indicate that a venue/activity is accessible.

Cardholders should check accessibility with the venue/activity operator before booking tickets.

Why has the Companion Card been developed?

The Companion Card program was first introduced by the Victorian Government in 2003 as a response to concerns

from people with disability that the pricing policies of some entertainment, leisure and recreation venues were discriminatory.

It was considered unfair to require people with disability to purchase two tickets—one for themselves and another for their companion—when, without the support of the companion, they would not be able to visit the venue or participate in the event.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring people with disability have the opportunity to participate equally in community life and has adopted the Companion Card program as a further way of upholding this right.

The program is also a practical way of supporting carers of people with disability. It may assist carers when advocating on behalf of the person with a disability for the right to not incur the cost of an additional ticket. The Companion Card may also ease some of the additional costs incurred while undertaking their caring role.

The program is endorsed by both the ACT and Australian Human Rights Commission.

The ACT Companion Card program is an ACT Government initiative, through the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

Who is eligible for the card?

To be eligible for an ACT Companion Card you must demonstrate that you:

1. are a lawful Australian resident living in ACT
2. have a permanent disability

3. because of the impact of your disability, you are unable to participate at most community venues or activities without attendant care support
4. you need, or are likely to need, lifelong attendant care support.

The card will only be issued if you meet ALL the criteria for the program.

The Companion Card is issued in the name of the person who has the disability. Carers and service providers are not eligible to apply for a Companion Card.

There are no income or asset tests, nor are there fees associated with the application process.

The Companion Card is not issued to every person who has a disability.

There may be circumstances where an individual may use the support of a companion but will not qualify to receive a Companion Card. Examples include:

- a person who is experiencing a temporary impairment
- a person whose expected development or recovery may mean that they will not require lifelong attendant care support
- a person who is affected by the inaccessibility of a particular venue
- a person who chooses to have a companion to provide social company or reassurance
- a person who chooses to have a companion rather than use available aids, equipment or alternative strategies to access an venue or activity.

In situations such as these, it is up to the individual and the venue or activity operators to negotiate an alternative method to verify the need for attendant care support.

What is attendant care support?

Attendant care support includes significant assistance with mobility, communication, self-care, learning or decision making, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies does not enable the person to carry out these tasks independently. The need for attendant care support must be, or likely to be, lifelong.

It does not include the companion providing only social company, reassurance or encouragement.

Who is a companion?

A companion is any person who accompanies a cardholder for the purpose of providing significant attendant care support.

The cardholder's chosen companion may be a paid or unpaid assistant or carer, friend, family member or partner. The cardholder's companion will not necessarily be the same person each time.

How to apply for a card:

To apply for a Companion Card, you must complete the Companion Card Application Form and submit two colour passport-sized photographs of yourself with your application. You will need to have a health professional or service provider fill out Part B of the application form and verify the two photographs you submit with your application.

You will be asked to provide some personal details as well as information about your diagnosis and the specific attendant care support that you require.

Application forms can be downloaded from www.companioncard.act.gov.au or phone (02) 6207 1086 for a form to be posted to you.

Assessment of application:

The Companion Card program will assess each application against all of the four eligibility criteria for the program.

The ACT Companion Card program may contact you, your health professional or service provider to verify the accuracy of the information you provide or to clarify your eligibility.

All persons applying for a Companion Card will be notified of the outcome of the application in writing.

Please note that completion of an application form does not guarantee a Companion Card will be issued.

Unsuccessful applications and the review process

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed about their rights to review and the processes and timeframes involved.

Any person who is not satisfied with the outcome of his or her application may request a review. A request for a review must be made in writing and may include any new information that assists in demonstrating the applicant meets the Companion Card eligibility criteria.

The additional information provided must be signed by a health professional or service provider. This does not have to be the same person who verified the original application form.

Providing acceptable photographs:

You will need to submit two identical colour passport-sized photographs with your application. The photos must be no more than six months old.

The photo will be printed on the Companion Card and be used by participating business affiliates to identify you as the cardholder. A business affiliate may refuse to issue a companion ticket if the photograph does not look like you.

The photographs, along with your completed application form, need to be signed by an appropriate health professional or service provider who can verify that the photographs represent you and that the information contained in the application form is correct.

Photographs will not be returned to you, regardless of the outcome of your application.

Photo quality and style

The following guidelines will help you provide suitable photographs, so that your application is not delayed by having to submit new photographs in the required format.

The basics:

- Colour photos only (not black and white)
- 45–50mm high and 35–40mm wide
- Printed on good quality gloss photo paper
- No grainy, pixelated or blurry images
- No red eye

Photos must:

- be of your head and top of your shoulders
- be no more than six months old

- have a plain, light-coloured background
- show both edges of your face
- show you looking at the camera and no hair in your eyes

Head coverings:

If you wear a head covering for religious or medical reasons, facial features from bottom of chin to top of forehead and both edges of your face must be clearly shown.

Glasses:

If you usually wear glasses, they must show your eyes clearly:

- no dark tinted lenses which restrict a clear view of your eyes
- no flash reflection off the lenses

Note: If you have difficulty meeting these requirements, please contact the Companion Card program to discuss your situation.

Using a Companion Card:

You should only use your Companion Card when you require the assistance of a companion to participate at a particular venue or activity. If you previously attended a venue or activity independently, this arrangement should continue, unchanged.

The Cardholder terms and conditions provide full details about how to use your card.

You must present your Companion Card when booking or buying a ticket from a participating business (affiliate). Affiliates will issue you with a second 'companion ticket' for

your companion at no charge. The companion ticket is also exempt from all booking fees.

If you book your ticket over the telephone, you must tell the operator that you require a companion ticket. You may need to provide your name, your Companion Card number and the card expiry date.

You may be required to show your Companion Card when purchasing or collecting tickets, or at any time during your attendance at a venue or activity. If you cannot present your card, you may be charged for the companion ticket. The companion ticket is not valid unless the cardholder is present. Only the person whose photograph and name appear on the card can use the Companion Card.

The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards held by the cardholder.

If you require more than one companion, you must negotiate this with the business affiliate at the time of booking.

How to use your Card appropriately:

The success and expansion of the Companion Card is dependent upon the good will of both cardholders and affiliates. Attempts to use the Companion Card when a companion is not required may jeopardise the willingness of businesses to participate in the program.

The Cardholder terms and conditions on page 19 provide full details about how to use your card. Attempts to misuse the Companion Card can result in card cancellation.

Where can I use the Companion Card?

Look for the distinctive Companion Card logo displayed by affiliates at the entrance of business premises or on their promotional and advertising material.

ACT-based businesses, venues and events that have formally agreed to accept the Companion Card are listed on the program website www.companioncard.act.gov.au.

You can also use your card interstate. Information on interstate programs and participating businesses operating throughout Australia is available on the national Companion Card website www.companioncard.gov.au.

If there is a venue or activity that you wish to attend, it is your responsibility to check with the venue, at the time of booking your tickets, if they will accept your Companion Card.

Some venue/activity operators may not know about the Companion Card (or may not display the logo), but may still accept your card if it is presented or when informed about the program. If a venue or activity operator needs more information, or would like to affiliate with the program, they can contact the Companion Card program via the website address and telephone number shown on the back of the card. By raising awareness in this way, it is hoped that more businesses will affiliate with the program

Business affiliation

Business participation in the program is voluntary. Any business or organisation that charges an admission or participation fee is encouraged to consider affiliating with the program.

Affiliation with the program is free, and the costs associated with providing a companion ticket must be absorbed by the business or organisation. Affiliates agree to:

- issue a minimum of one companion ticket at no charge to cardholders
- accept a Companion Card issued in any Australian state or territory
- abide by the Companion Card Affiliate terms and conditions.

Cardholders and their companions are encouraged to raise awareness about the program with businesses.

Replacement cards:

Cardholders may request a replacement Companion Card prior to the expiry date if the card is lost, stolen or damaged, or they have changed their name. If required, photographs may also be updated.

To request a replacement card, a Replacement/Change of Details form must be completed. This can be downloaded from www.companioncard.act.gov.au or phone (02) 6207 1086 for a form to be posted to you.

Change of contact details:

To advise the ACT Companion Card program about changes to your contact details, please complete a Replacement/Change of Details form and submit it to the ACT Companion Card program. This can be downloaded from www.companioncard.act.gov.au or phone

(02) 6207 1086 for a form to be posted to you.

A new card will not be issued for a change of address as it does not affect the details on the card.

Renewing cards:

ACT Companion Cards are issued for five years to approved applicants. The card is issued in the name of the person with the disability for his or her use only. The card expiry date is printed on the front of the card.

Cardholders will receive a reminder letter ahead of the expiry date with advice on the renewal process. As part of the renewal process, cardholders will be required to confirm their ongoing need for the Companion Card. Cardholders are also required to provide new photographs when renewing their card.

Cardholder Concerns:

If you have a complaint about the recognition of your Companion Card, or issues regarding access or unfair treatment at venues/activities, you should try to resolve this with the venue/activity management in the first instance before contacting the ACT Companion Card program.

Privacy:

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) has responsibility for administering the ACT Companion Card program.

DHCS will respect and protect privacy and collect, store, use, and disclose personal information responsibly and transparently when administering the Companion Card program in accordance with the privacy principles contained in the Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth).

Information and advice about disability discrimination:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes disability discrimination unlawful and aims to promote equal opportunity and access for people with disabilities. If you feel that you have been discriminated against, you may be able to get further information and advice from the following agencies:

Australian Human Rights Commission

Phone: (02) 9284 9600 or 1300 369 711

Complaints Infoline: 1300 656 419 or

complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

TTY: 1800 620 241

Website: www.humanrights.gov.au administering

ACT Human Rights Commission

Phone: (02) 6205 2222

TTY: (02) 6207 0525

Email: human.rights@act.gov.au

Website: www.hrc.act.gov.au

Frequently asked questions:

I can attend most places by myself but some venues are difficult because of their accessibility. Should I apply for a card to use at a specific venue only?

No, the card was not developed to compensate for the lack of accessibility of a specific venue. The Companion Card is issued to people who require attendant care support to participate at most venues and activities.

It is important to note that under existing anti-discrimination legislation, the overall responsibility for ensuring equal access to goods, services and facilities remains with the venue and activity owners and operators.

What if my condition is episodic?

The Companion Card program will consider applications from people whose conditions are episodic - (for example, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy or schizophrenia). Please provide information in your application about the frequency and impact of episodes and about why attendant care support is needed.

The Companion Card will not be issued for infrequent or unexpected events such as allergic reactions, falls or medical emergencies.

My child is only four years old. Are there age limits on who can apply for a Companion Card?

There are no age limits on who can receive a Companion Card, however to be eligible for the card, applicants must demonstrate a lifelong need for attendant care support. Generally children up to a certain age require a parent/supervisor to perform functions similar to that of a companion. Companion Cards cannot be issued if the applicant has the potential to become independent in the future as a result of treatment, management, training, recovery, or developmental improvement or rehabilitation/treatment improvements. If a child's condition will improve, and he or she is likely to become independent, the child will not be eligible for a card.

I have recently sustained an injury and now require attendant care. I am undergoing treatment therapy in the hope that I will regain my independence in the future. Am I eligible?

A Companion Card will not be issued for a temporary impairment where it is likely that you will regain your independence as a result of your rehabilitation or recovery program. It is best to wait until you have completed your rehabilitation or recovery program to determine if you have an ongoing need for attendant care support.

In situations where companion support is required but you do not qualify for a Companion Card, you should attempt to negotiate with the operators of the activity or venue.

I provide attendant care on a regular basis. Can I apply for a Companion Card?

No, cards are only issued to a person with a disability who has met the eligibility criteria. The cardholder chooses who they take as a companion to each venue or activity. There is no requirement that the cardholder is always accompanied by the same companion. Cards are not issued to groups, facilities or organisations.

I live outside ACT. Can I apply for an ACT Companion Card?

No, applications for a Companion Card should be made to the state or territory of your principal residence. Visit the national Companion Card website www.companioncard.gov.au for more information on the program in your home state.

Participating businesses will recognise cardholders from other states and territories.

Can I use my Companion Card for proof of age?

No, the Companion Card is not a proof of age card. The application process does not require a copy of your birth certificate or other proof of age documentation and your date of birth are not displayed on the 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 from any Australian state or territory with one companion ticket, or admission, at no charge. This ticket will be exempt from all booking fees.
- 3 Where a cardholder needs more than one companion to provide the attendant care support, the cardholder will negotiate this with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.
- 4 The Companion Card can be used to obtain a companion ticket for any programs, services and sessions run by affiliated venue/activity operators. This will be subject to the usual admission availability and conditions.
- 5 Booking and ticket distribution practices for companion tickets should not be more difficult than the standard ticketing practices of the affiliated venue/activity.
- 6 The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards.
- 7 The venue/activity must ensure cardholders can 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.

Cardholder terms and conditions

- 1 The Companion Card must only be used when the cardholder requires the assistance of a companion to participate at a particular venue/activity.
- 2 Only the person whose photograph and details appear on the Companion Card can use the card.
- 3 Companion tickets cannot be used without the Companion Card cardholder being present.
- 4 Companion Card cardholders must inform the venue/activity operator of their requirement for a companion ticket at the time they book or purchase their own ticket.
- 5 Acceptance of the Companion Card does not indicate that a venue/activity is accessible. Cardholders are advised to check accessibility with the venue/activity operator before booking tickets.
- 6 The minimum expectation of Companion Card affiliates is that they will issue cardholders, who require assistance to participate, with one companion ticket or admission, at

no charge. This ticket will be exempt from all booking fees.

- 7 Where a cardholder has a requirement for more than one companion, the cardholder must negotiate this with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.
- 8 The Companion Card can be used to obtain admission for any programs, services and sessions run by affiliated venue/activity operators. This will be subject to the usual admission availability and conditions.
- 9 The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards.
- 10 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.
- 11 Affiliated venues/activities must ensure cardholders are able to be located physically close to their companions. Companions must remain close to cardholders to assist them as required. Cardholders with specific seating requirements must inform the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.
- 12 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 venues/activities 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.
- 13 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 booking a package deal, cardholders must check with the venue/activity operator, 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.

- 14 Booking and ticket distribution practices for companion tickets should not be more difficult than the standard ticketing practices of the affiliated venue/activity.
- 15 If an affiliated venue/activity operator suspects that a Companion Card is being misused, they can report this to the Companion Card program. Proven misuse of the Companion Card may result in the card being cancelled, and the cardholder will be ineligible to reapply.
- 16 It is understood that the applicant accepts the Companion Card Cardholder terms and conditions when they submit a Companion Card Application Form.

Key contacts

ACT Companion Card Program

Phone: (02) 6207 1086

TTY: (02) 6205 0888

Email: companioncard@act.gov.au

GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601

www.companioncard.act.gov.au

National Relay Service

Type & Read, Type & Listen, or Speak & Read: 133 677

Speak & Listen (speech-to-speech relay): 1300 555 727

Internet Relay Call: www.relayservice.com.au and ask to be connected to the ACT Companion Card Program on (02) 6207 1086.

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible. If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format (such as large print or audio) please telephone (02) 6205 0619.

If English is not your first language and you require the translating and interpreting service — please telephone 131 450.

The ACT Companion Card program is an initiative of the ACT Government through the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS).

Further information about the program is available from the ACT Companion Card website www.companioncard.act.gov.au