



ACT Companion Card Program

Cardholder Handbook

Supported by:



About this handbook

This handbook can assist you to understand how the ACT Companion Card Program works and whether you should apply for an ACT 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 significant, permanent 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 any person who accompanies a cardholder for the purpose of providing 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.

Affiliate - is used to describe businesses, organisations, events or activities that officially register to support the Companion Card Program.

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 planning and problem solving, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies does not enable the person to carry out tasks independently. Attendant care does not include providing reassurance or encouragement nor can it be for infrequent or unexpected events or medical emergencies.



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About the Companion Card

The Companion Card enables people with disability who require life-long 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; and
- 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 or activity is accessible.

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

Why has the Companion Card been developed?

The Companion Card 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 administered by the Community Services Directorate in partnership with Access Canberra.

Who is eligible for the card?

To be eligible for a Companion Card in the ACT, an applicant must demonstrate that they meet all four of the eligibility criteria prior to a Companion Card being issued. The presence of any disability alone does not entitle an individual to a Companion Card.

- Criteria 1 - Applicants must be a permanent resident of Australia, residing in the ACT;
- Criteria 2 - Applicants must demonstrate that they have a significant, permanent disability;



- Criteria 3 - Applicants must demonstrate that, due to the impact of the disability, they would be unable to participate at most community venues or activities without attendant care support; and
- Criteria 4 - Applicants must demonstrate that the need for this level of attendant care will be life-long.

A Companion Card is issued in the name of the person who has the disability. Service providers, organisations or potential companions are not eligible to apply for a Companion Card. The card can only be issued to a child applicant where the companion is required due to the disability (not due to age alone).

There is no income, asset tests or fees associated with the application process.

Who is a companion?

A companion is any person who accompanies a cardholder for the purpose of providing 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.

What is attendant care support?

Attendant care includes significant assistance with mobility, communication, self-care or planning and problem solving, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies does not enable the person to carry out tasks independently. Attendant care does not include providing reassurance or encouragement nor can it be for infrequent or unexpected events or medical emergencies.



The Companion Card cannot be issued to people who only require attendant care for social support, reassurance, encouragement or just-in-case-type of scenarios.

The Companion Card is not issued to every person who has a disability. The card is issued to people who can demonstrate that they would not be able to participate at most venues and activities without a companion, and that this need is life-long. A Companion Card cannot be issued if the applicant may become independent in the future as a result of treatment or management, training, recovery or developmental improvements. A Companion Card can only be issued when an ongoing need for a companion can be demonstrated.

Limits of the Companion Card

The Companion Card is a tool to facilitate the rights of people with a disability under existing disability discrimination legislation. Some people with disability may not meet the eligibility criteria for the Companion Card, but may still have rights under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth).

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- people with a temporary disability;
- people who cannot demonstrate a life-long need for a companion (including people with conditions subject to developmental improvement, treatment, management or recovery);
- people who chose to exercise their right not to hold a Companion Card;



- people who do not require a Companion Card at most events (including people who require a Companion Card only to compensate for the inaccessibility of particular venues); and
- overseas visitors.

Companion Card and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

People who have a Companion Card need a very high level of support permanently. Their support needs will always remain high. Some people get support from the NDIS so they need less help later and their needs may not remain at a high level throughout their lives.

If you have an NDIS plan and would like to apply for a Companion Card it is important that you still send any copies of reports you might have about your disability as this will help us assess your application.

Please note: Not everyone with NDIS funding is eligible for a Companion Card.

What if I don't qualify for a card?

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 be eligible for a Companion Card. Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- when a person is experiencing temporary impairment;
- where the need for attendant care support is not life-long;



- when a person is affected by the inaccessibility of a particular venue;
- when a person chooses to have a companion to provide social company or reassurance; and
- when a person chooses to have a companion rather than use available aids, equipment or alternative strategies to access a 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.

How to apply for or renew an ACT Companion Card?

To apply for an ACT Companion Card, applicants (or their representative) must complete and submit an ACT Companion Card Cardholder Application Form.

Application forms can be downloaded from www.companioncard.act.gov.au or telephone (02) 6205 4333, email companioncard@act.gov.au for a form to be posted to you.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application in writing. Applications can only be made by individuals. Facilities, organisations, or potential companions are not eligible to apply for a Companion Card.

Please note: it will take approximately 20 working days for your application to be processed. Applicants may be contacted to provide further information as part of the eligibility assessment.

Assessment of application

The ACT 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 and your health professional 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. 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 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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 your ACT Companion Card

All people using the ACT Companion Card are required to accept and adhere to the Companion Cardholder Terms and Conditions.

You can present your ACT Companion Card when you are booking or purchasing your tickets from a participating Business Affiliate. The Affiliate will issue you with a second "companion ticket" for your companion at no charge. The companion ticket is also exempt from all booking fees. Only the person whose name and photograph appears on the card can use the Companion Card.

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 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.

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.

Where can I use the Companion Card?

Venue and event operators who wish to be participating Business Affiliates are encouraged to formally register their acceptance of the Companion Card.

A list of ACT venues, events and activity operators that have formally agreed to accept the Companion Card is available at Affiliate List section of the ACT Companion Card Program website.

Some venue or activity operators may not know about the Companion Card but may still accept your card when produced or if you tell them about the program. If a venue or activity operator needs more information, or would like to affiliate with the program, they can contact the ACT Companion Card Program via the web address or 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.

Please note: Acceptance of the Companion Card does not indicate that a venue or activity is accessible. Cardholders should check accessibility with the venue or activity operator before booking tickets.

How to use your Card appropriately?

The success and expansion of the ACT Companion Card Program depends on the good will of both Cardholders and participating Business Affiliates. Attempts to use the Companion Card when a companion is not required may jeopardise the willingness of businesses to participate in the program.

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.

Cardholders must also renew their cards periodically and confirm their ongoing eligibility. It is also a requirement that cardholders advise the program of a change in their circumstances that may affect their eligibility to hold a card.

The Companion Cardholder Terms and Conditions provide full details about how to use your Companion Card. Attempts to misuse the Companion Card can result in Card cancellation.

Using your Companion Card interstate

You can use your ACT Companion Card interstate at participating businesses. Information on interstate Companion Card Programs and participating businesses throughout Australia is available on the National Companion Card website at <http://www.companioncard.gov.au/>.



Business affiliation

Affiliates are businesses, organisations, events or activities that officially register to support the Companion Card Program.

Affiliates agree to abide by the ACT Companion Card Program Affiliate Terms and Conditions. This includes agreeing to:

- issue a minimum of one companion ticket at no charge to cardholders;
- accept a Companion Card issued in any Australian State or Territory;
- display the Companion Card logo in a prominent position at their business premises or ticketing outlet; and
- have their business details listed on the ACT Companion Card Program website.

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

Acceptance of the Companion Card does not indicate that the venue or activity is accessible. Cardholders are advised to check accessibility with the Business Affiliate before booking tickets.

Renewal process

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 courtesy reminder letter ahead of the expiry date with advice on the renewal process. As part of the renewal process. Cardholders are also required to provide new photographs when renewing their card. No further action is taken until contact is made by the cardholder or their representative.

Replacement card

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 please contact the ACT Companion Card Program.

Change of contact details

Cardholders are advised to contact the ACT Companion Card Program if their contact details change. A new card will not be issued for a change of address as it does not affect the details on the card.

Moving interstate

When an ACT Companion Cardholder relocates to another State or Territory within Australia, the cardholder must contact the Companion Card Program in that State or Territory to get further advice.

Cardholder Concerns

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

Affiliated businesses are encouraged to develop their own complaints procedure to manage issues relating to the Companion Card.

Privacy

The Community Services Directorate has responsibility for administering the ACT Companion Card Program in partnership with Access Canberra.

ACT Government 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) and *Information Privacy Act 2014* (ACT).

Information and advice about disability discrimination

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth) 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 Email
complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

TTY: 1800 620 241

Website: www.humanrights.gov.au

ACT Human Rights Commission

Phone: (02) 6205 2222

Email: human.rights@act.gov.au

TTY: (02) 6205 1666

Website: www.hrc.act.gov.au

Frequently asked questions

Who can help me complete an application form?

You may seek assistance from any person to complete your application form.

For children or adults who are unable to sign the applicant declaration and authorisation, the applicant's formal or informal decision maker may sign on the applicant's behalf. This may be a legal guardian, enduring power of attorney or unpaid carer.

A specified health professional must also sign your form as outlined in the application form.

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 Companion 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 venues and activities.

In a situation such as this, it is up to the individual and the venue or activity operator to negotiate an alternative method to verify the need for attendant care support.

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 venue and activity owners and operators.



What if my condition is episodic?

The ACT Companion Card Program will consider applications from individuals who have episodic conditions (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.

If someone's need for attendant care is not life-long, is there a temporary card?

The Companion Card can only be issued to people with a permanent disability who require life-long attendant care support.

If someone has a serious injury that shows signs of improvement, are they eligible?

If the applicant becomes independent in the future as a result of treatment, management, training, recovery or developmental improvements they are ineligible for a Companion Card.

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 operator of the activity or venue.

Can children apply?

Children may apply for an ACT Companion Card however they must demonstrate a life-long need for attendant care support. In the case of children, it is often difficult to determine their potential. If a child's condition will improve, and he or she is likely to become independent, the child will not be eligible for a Companion Card.

Does working full-time prevent me receiving a Companion Card?

No, there is no income or asset test for a Companion Card.

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

No, applications for a Companion Card are made to the State or Territory of your principal residence. Participating business affiliates in the ACT will recognise cardholders from other States and Territories.

Information on interstate programs and participating businesses operating throughout Australia is available on the National Companion Card Website.

I regularly provide attendant care. Can I apply for a Companion Card?

No, Companion Cards are only issued to a person with a disability who has met the eligibility criteria, and the cardholder must be present when purchasing a companion ticket. The cardholder may choose his or her companion. Cards are not issued to groups, facilities or organisations.

Can I use my Companion Card for proof of age?

No, the Companion Card is not a proof of age card; it only identifies the cardholder as a person who, due to their disability, always



requires attendant care support from a companion to participate at venues or activities.

The application process does not require a copy of your birth certificate or other proof of age documentation and your date of birth is not displayed on the card.

What if I don't qualify for a card?

The Companion Card is not for every person with 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:

- when a person is experiencing temporary impairment;
- where the need for attendant care support is not life-long;
- when a person is affected by the inaccessibility of a particular venue;
- when a person chooses to have a companion to provide social company or reassurance; and
- when a person 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 operator to negotiate an alternative method to verify the need for attendant care support.

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 or 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 or 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 or activity is accessible. Cardholders are advised to check accessibility with the venue or 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 or 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 or 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 or 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 or activity operator at the time of booking.
12. Some venue or 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 or 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 or activity.
15. If an affiliated venue or 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 Cardholder Application Form.

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 or 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 attendant care support, the cardholder will negotiate this with the venue or 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 or 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 or activity.
6. The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards.
7. The venue or 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 or activity at the time of booking.
8. Some venue or 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 or 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 or 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 or 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 or activity is accessible. Cardholders will be advised to check accessibility with the venue or 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 or 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 or activity operators and organisations agree to and accept the Companion Card Affiliate Terms and Conditions when they submit the Industry Affiliation Form.

Key contacts

ACT Companion Card Program

Phone: (02) 6205 4333

National Relay Service: 133 677

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) 6205 4333.

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 Community Services Directorate in partnership with Access Canberra.

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

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