

Taxi drivers: Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Everyone in B.C. has a human right to access services like restaurants and cafés without experiencing discrimination.

This right is protected in B.C.'s *Human Rights Code* and includes people with disabilities who use guide dogs and service dogs. It is [discrimination](#) to deny a person with a disability who uses a guide dog or service dog access to a service.

To help raise awareness about this issue, our Office worked with guide dog and service dog users as well as people working in the restaurant and taxi industries to create educational resources like this FAQ. This FAQ aims to help taxi drivers provide excellent, accessible customer service and meet their legal responsibilities under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*.

Guide dog and service dog users, taxis and human rights

What rights do people who use a guide dog or a service dog have in B.C.?

Like everyone else, people with disabilities who use a guide dog or a service dog have a right to access services available to the public like stores, taxis, hospitals and restaurants. In British Columbia, this right is protected by B.C.'s [Human Rights Code](#).

In British Columbia it is illegal to discriminate against a person because of their disability. However, people with disabilities who use a guide dog or service dog often experience discrimination when trying to access services like taxis. They report being denied rides, having taxi drivers refuse to allow them into their cars and even having taxi drivers drive away and leaving them stranded. This is discrimination. These experiences are frustrating, stressful and can be dangerous.

For more information, please visit our website: bchumanrights.ca/guide-dogs

Taxi drivers and human rights obligations

As a taxi driver, what human rights obligations do I have?

If you provide a service to the general public through your work, like driving a taxi, then you have a legal obligation under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code* to accommodate people who have disabilities, in every reasonable way. People who have disabilities

sometimes use a guide dog or service dog in their everyday activities. Under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*, it is your responsibility as a taxi driver to accommodate people who have a disability and use a guide dog or service dog.

I have heard that all guide dogs and service dogs must have special certification papers. Is that true?

No, that is not true. Certification of guide dogs or service dogs is purely voluntary and is not required. That means that some guide dogs and service dogs may have certification documents and others may not.

You cannot legally refuse service to a person who uses a guide dog or service dog because they do not have certification papers.

I thought I had to ask for certification before I could let guide dogs or service dogs into the taxi. Don't I have to ask?

No, there is no requirement to ask for certification. Asking for certification can single out people who use guide dogs and service dogs in ways that can be distressing and dehumanizing.

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I don't own the car that I drive, do I still have human rights responsibilities?

Even if you don't own the car that you drive, you have an obligation under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code* not to discriminate against people trying to access your service. The owner of the car also has human rights obligations not to discriminate against people trying to access their services. This includes not discriminating against people who use a guide dog or service dog.

I have never picked up someone who uses a guide dog or service dog before. What do I do?

Many taxi drivers do not have experience serving people who use a guide dog or service dog. You may feel nervous or unprepared for this situation. BCOHRC's infographic provides tips and ideas for providing accessible service, specifically for Blind and visually impaired customers who use guide dogs. Remember, if you are unsure how to provide accessible service for your customer, it is always a good idea to ask the customer how you can serve them best! As a rule, being friendly, considerate, polite and not interacting with the dog are good places to start.

You cannot refuse to pick up a person with a disability who uses a guide dog or service dog simply because you do not have experience or training or you feel uncomfortable. Remember, you have a legal obligation not to discriminate against people with disabilities.

Is it really that serious if I don't let them into my taxi? Can't they just get another taxi?

Denying a person with a disability a service that is available to the public, like a taxi ride, is serious. In British Columbia, this is discrimination. People with disabilities often rely on taxis for transportation. For example, they may rely on taxis to take them to and from medical visits, work or school. Blind and visually impaired people who use guide dogs report experiencing this kind of discrimination often when trying to access taxis and other transportation services. They describe these experiences as stressful, frightening and dangerous.

People with disabilities in British Columbia have a right to equal access to services like taxis. That means that they have the same right to a taxi ride as any other customer. Driving away, refusing to allow them into your car or refusing to pick them up are not acceptable. As a taxi driver you have a legal obligation to take all reasonable steps to accommodate people with disabilities—it's the law.

What is the difference between a pet dog and a guide dog or service dog?

Pet dogs are not the same as guide dogs and service dogs. Pet dogs provide companionship to their owners but do not have any specialized training related to a disability or help their owners with the daily tasks of living.

Guide dogs and service dogs are animals that provide important assistance to people with disabilities. Only people with disabilities use guide dogs or service dogs. Both guide dogs and service dogs receive specialized training so that they can help people with disabilities with their daily tasks like going to the grocery store or getting to work safely. Guide dogs help people who are Blind or have visual impairments and service dogs help people with other kinds of disabilities such as (but not limited to) hearing impairments, epilepsy or diabetes. Guide dogs and service dogs are very well trained and well behaved and often wear special harnesses that include a body piece and a handle.

How does the guide dog or service dog fit into the car?

Guide dogs and service dogs are very well-trained and well-behaved animals. They are trained to stay with their owner in the front or back passenger areas of the car beside their owner. Guide dogs and service dogs must not be separated from their owners and placed in another part of the car. Guide dogs and service dogs must never ride in the trunk of a car.

Do I have to touch the dog or hold the harness?

You will not have to touch the guide dog or service dog or hold the harness. In fact, for the safety of their owner, you should never interact with, touch or pet a guide dog or service dog or reach for or grab their harness or leash. These dogs are very well trained and should not be distracted from their work. If you have any questions about how you can help a customer who uses a guide dog or service dog, feel free to ask them. They will tell you if they need assistance and how you can help.

I don't like dogs. Do I have to allow them in my car?

Some taxi drivers may not like being near a dog—even a well-behaved and trained guide dog or service dog. Not liking dogs is not sufficient reason to deny someone with a disability access to your taxi. You do not have to like dogs to accommodate a customer who uses a guide dog or service dog. As a taxi driver it is your responsibility to accommodate customers with disabilities.

What about the car? I don't want to get dog fur on my seats.

Some drivers have concerns about the upholstery in their car. The concern about dog fur on upholstery is not sufficient reason to deny a person with a disability access to your taxi. It is your legal responsibility to accommodate customers with disabilities.

If you are worried about getting dog fur on your upholstery, you may choose to use a blanket to cover the seats when a guide dog or service dog is in the car or use a pet hair lint roller to remove any pet fur on the seats after the customer and the guide dog or service dog has exited the car.

To provide feedback, please contact us at: info@bchumanrights.ca

Disclaimer: This FAQ provides general information only and is not legal advice. If you need advice about a legal problem, please contact a lawyer or legal clinic.

Current as of: BCOHRC most recently reviewed this FAQ for legal accuracy in August 2024.