

# Servers: 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 servers provide excellent, accessible customer service and meet their legal responsibilities under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*.

## Guide dog and service dog users, restaurants 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 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 who use a guide dog or service dog often experience discrimination when trying to access services like restaurants, cafes or bars. They report being denied service because of their guide dog or service dog. This is discrimination.

For more information, please visit our website: [bchumanrights.ca/guide-dogs](http://bchumanrights.ca/guide-dogs)

# Food and beverage servers and human rights obligations

## As a server, what human rights obligations do I have?

If you provide a service to the public through your work, like serving customers at a cafe, bar or restaurant, 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 server to accommodate people who have a disability and use a guide dog or service dog.

## I have heard that all guide dog users must have special certification papers. Is that true?

No, that is not true. Certification of guide dogs and 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 with a guide dog or service dog because they don't have certification papers.

## I thought I had to ask all guide dog users for certification. 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.

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 can't legally refuse service to a person who uses a guide dog or service dog because they do not have certification papers.

## I don't own the restaurant. Do I still have human rights responsibilities?

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

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

Many servers do not have experience serving people who use a guide dog or service dog and 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 or touching the dog are good places to start.

You cannot refuse to serve 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 serve them? Can't they just go to another restaurant?

Denying a person with a disability a service that is available to the public is serious. In British Columbia, this is discrimination. Blind or visually impaired people who use guide dogs report that they often experience this kind of discrimination when trying to access restaurants, cafes and bars.

People with disabilities in British Columbia have a right to equal access to services like restaurants, bars and cafes. That means that they have the same right to your service as any other person. Refusing to seat or serve a person because they have a guide dog or service dog is not acceptable. As a server you have a legal obligation to provide every reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities—it's the law.

## What are the rules about letting guide dogs into cafes and restaurants? Are they allowed everywhere, even in the kitchen?

Like everyone else in B.C., people who use guide dogs and service dogs have a right to access services like restaurants, bars and cafes. In B.C., this right is protected in B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*. In terms of the law, it may be helpful to think of a guide dog or service dog and their owner as an inseparable unit. Together, they have the same status as any other customer. So, anywhere that a person without a guide dog or service dog would be permitted to go, like an indoor dining area, a washroom or a patio, a person with a guide dog or service dog is also permitted. Restaurant customers, whether they use a guide dog or service dog or not, are generally not permitted into food preparation areas.

## What about other customers? What if they are scared of the dog or have allergies?

Sometimes other customers may not feel comfortable being seated near a dog—even a well-behaved and trained guide dog or service dog. It is your responsibility to try to accommodate the needs of your customers and provide potential solutions. For example, servers could find separate seating areas for customers who do not wish to sit near the dog or educate customers who object to guide dogs and service dogs about accessibility rights for people with disabilities under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*.

## 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. They help people with disabilities to be more independent. 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.

## 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 serve them?

Some servers 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 restaurant, bar or cafe. You do not have to like dogs to accommodate a customer who uses a guide dog or service dog. It is your responsibility to accommodate your customers with disabilities.

To provide feedback, please contact us at: [info@bchumanrights.ca](mailto: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.