# Dog Guide Handlers Australia newsletter September 2023

Welcome to the Spring edition of the DGHA newsletter for September 2023. In this edition, you will read about the recent Dog Guide conference held in Brisbane, an article about honoring your Dog Guide at the end of their lives and an update from DGHA.

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## Chairperson’s report

### Here’s to a successful conference

On behalf of the DGHA Committee I’d like to thank those who contributed to the success of our biennial conference in early August. It was our fifth and biggest conference yet with 73 attendees and 39 Dog Guides. We hope you enjoyed yourselves as much as we enjoyed organizing the event. Thank you to everyone – attendees, presenters, volunteers and volunteer Orientation and Mobility instructors, friends, family and support workers for creating such a positive and supportive vibe throughout the weekend. You can read Stephanie’s review below which covers the highlights. Now that we’ve had a few weeks to recover, we’re looking forward to another conference in 2025. If you’d like to be involved, please let us know you’d like to join our conference committee by emailing dgha@dgha.org.au. Planning will begin in late 2024.

### What is important to you in the design of an assistance dog toilet?

As you’ll see below, Sydney Airport have closed their assistance animal toilet for renovation. We’ve offered to provide feedback and suggestions on design from Dog Guide Handlers and have gathered the below suggestions from our Facebook group. We will share this feedback with Sydney Airport in the coming weeks. If you’d like to contribute your ideas on what an assistance animal toilet should include, please email your thoughts to dgha@dgha.org.au by COB Tuesday 3 October.

Question asked on Facebook: If we could have input into a new assistance dog toilet design, what would you recommend? Think about existing airport assistance dog toilets you've used and what works and what doesn't. Below is a summary of the answers given by DGHA Facebook group members.

* Easy to find, central location/s, after security with step by step instructions and BindiMaps available to make finding the location easier.
* Appropriate signage – large print, Braille, BindiMapped, ground surface tactile indicators across the pathway. Signage to indicate layout of the space, where everything is.
* An easy to find phone number to call if there are issues for example if the hose for washing the area is broken we don’t want to be feeling around on the walls.
* Use Brisbane Airport as an example, needs to be co designed with consumers and advised by access consultants from Dog Guide schools.
* Needs to be bigger than it was, at least 3m x 2m to cater for up to 44kg dogs.
* Antibacterial cleaning spray available to sanitise the area after use.
* A handler toilet in the same room would mean one less toilet to find
* ‘Magic bin’ to put full poop bags in – wave your hand over the bin and the lid opens automatically
* A grab rail around the AstroTurf to make pickup easier.
* A hob around the grass to contain water
* Easy access for wheelchairs
* Somewhere to hang your harness, enough space to put luggage and it not get wet.
* Sliding door rather than swinging door
* Appropriate lighting, not too bright but bright enough.

### AACTRS

The Assistance Dogs Advisory Committee – Taxi and Rideshare Services (AACTRS) continues to meet regularly. The team consists of Guide Dogs Australia, Assistance Dogs Australia,  DGHA, Blind Citizens Australia and TravelPaws. We are commencing our discussions with relevant government stakeholders in Victoria where we will be piloting our efforts. We understand that refusals are still a daily occurrence. We know this is unacceptable. We are determined to do whatever it takes and for however long to eliminate refusals.

## Sydney Airport assistance animal toilet at T2 is temporarily closed

Sydney Airport have advised the assistance animal toilet at T2 is closed until early 2024. The assistance animal toilet and watering facilities are available at the T1 International Terminal after security on the arrivals level.

Link to [**Sydney Airport website**](https://www.sydneyairport.com.au/info-sheet/Accessible-facilities-and-services#accessible-facilities-services-accessible-facilities-animal-relief).

## Oh Crap partnership

Anyone who attended the DGHA conference with a Dog Guide will have received a couple of rolls of Oh Crap poo bags as part of their goodie bag. DGHA have partnered with Oh Crap and by using [this link](https://www.ohcrap.com.au/?ref=dgha&utm_source=partner) you will receive a discount on your purchase and a percentage of your purchase will go to DGHA. They stock traditional poop bags and bags with handles in various quantities and many other accessories. Please check them out!

## Conference review - August 2023

The DGHA Conference 2023, held at the Royal on the Park in Brisbane from August 4th to 6th, brought together professionals, advocates, and Handlers of the Dog Guide community. With a focus on improving accessibility, promoting positive change, and sharing research, the conference was an engaging experience for all attendees.

The conference's Friday evening expo featured various organisations, each showcasing their innovative products and services designed to enhance the lives of vision-impaired individuals. The presence of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs, BindiMaps, Quantum, Vickie Anderson and Associates, Staple Working Dog and other prominent names provided attendees with a comprehensive view of the latest technology and products.

### Keynote speakers and presentations

The conference's presentations were engaging, particularly the keynote address by Iain Edwards, who shared his inspiring journey as an executive leader with lived experience of blindness. Edwards emphasised the significance of using our voices in formal and informal leadership roles, expressing the importance of empowerment.

An important moment during the conference was the discussion of the court ruling in the Ryan v SCHHS case. This ruling discusses the urgency for inclusive design in public spaces, setting a precedent for the accessibility rights of blind individuals. The comprehensive presentation on this case sheds light on the complex interplay between standards, codes, and legislation, prompting essential discussions on the future of accessibility in public infrastructure.

### Advocacy and Policy

A substantial portion of the conference was dedicated to advocacy and policy discussions. Mitchell Skipsey's insights into durable solutions for transport accessibility and Michelle Cohen's work on discrimination and human rights brought to light the challenges faced by disabled individuals, particularly concerning Dog Guide refusals on rideshare platforms. Amanda Muller's presentation on shifting the focus from victims to perpetrators in cases of Dog Guide refusal for those using ride-share services introduced a fresh perspective on advocating for change. The emphasis was on introducing a national reporting app for instances of refusal as part of the solution to this significant issue.

### Highlights and Workshops

The conference wasn't solely about presentations and discussions. The 'Dogtail' party, with its dog-guide-related cocktail names and accessible menus in Braille and large print, was a delightful social event, fostering connections and discussions in a relaxed atmosphere. The workshops, such as Anna Gigliotti-Skret's session on understanding dog communication, provided hands-on learning experiences and opportunities for deeper engagement.

### Social activities

The tour to St Helena island organised by Cocky Guides was a highlight of the conference, blending historical exploration with social interaction. This, along with networking dinners and gatherings, allowed attendees to connect personally, share experiences, and build lasting friendships.

The DGHA Conference 2023 was a comprehensive event that addressed vital issues for Dog Guide handlers, accessibility, and advocacy. The diverse range of presentations, workshops, and interactions showcased the dedication of individuals and organisations in the pursuit of inclusion. While there were a few instances where specific topics could have been explored in more detail, the conference succeeded in creating meaningful conversations, fostering connections, and inspiring positive change.

## End-of-Life Preparations for Dog Guides

By Anna Gigliotti-Skret, qualified Dog Guide Mobility Instructor and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M/COMS) from [Forward Thinking Dog Training and Mobility](https://www.forwardthinkingdogtraining.com.au/home)

Please note that this article may be distressing for some readers - please practice self-care if needed.

TRIGGER WARNING: death of a loved Dog Guide, bodily functions, medical procedures

As a Dog Guide Instructor, I understand that there is no way to entirely prepare yourself emotionally for the death of your loyal guiding partner. It is a tough conversation and one that is often skimmed over to make way for lighter and easier topics. It can help to have plans or awareness in place in advance.

It is important to keep your Dog Guide school informed when there are any changes in your dog’s health and to monitor and discuss retirement plans. Sometimes things change suddenly and earlier than anticipated, so please don’t wait until you are stuck in the thick of disaster to then try to work out what to do.

Our dogs can be incredibly stoic and don’t always show us that they are suffering until they are quite unwell or in pain. When the time comes to say your final goodbye, consider where you would like that to take place and how. Did you know that many vets are able to come to your home to perform the euthanasia? It is a good idea to check with your local vet if they perform a home service or if they only do so in the clinic. There are also vets whose work is dedicated to home euthanasias. I will share some links below. If this is your preferred option, perhaps you can ask if they will do a meet and greet prior to a euthanasia so that your dog is not meeting a stranger for the first time on their last day with you. I am uncertain if this is an option. You would have to check with individual providers.

Here is an article about how to assess your dog’s quality of life and contains links to Quality of Life assessment scales that are available online. <https://toegrips.com/quality-of-life-scale-dogs/>

Your local vet is a great resource to chat to about the decision-making process, as well as chatting it over with a counsellor. Consider having a support person with you on the day. They can help with practical aspects like managing other household pets, making cups of tea, driving you to and from the clinic and debriefing the experience.

I’m now going to talk about the process on the day. This may vary according to your local vet, your dog’s health, or other circumstances, but the following may provide an idea of what you might expect. Speak to your local vet about what you are likely to expect during and after the procedure.

It can be confusing to see your dog greet the vets enthusiastically, your dog appearing so joyful, and you might feel unsure if this is indeed the right day for it. Don’t forget that people have regrets for holding on too long and allowing the dog to be in pain for longer than necessary. It is a challenge to know precisely when is the perfect time. In such cases, there might not ever be that perfect time. Forgive yourself for any indecision or uncertainty as it arises.

The process should be a respectful and calm one. First, the dog is injected with a sedative. This may take many minutes for it to take effect, and the aim is that your dog becomes calm and relaxed prior to the end procedure. A side effect may be vomiting. This does not occur in every case, but it’s useful to be aware of it. Once the sedative takes effect, the dog ideally will lie down and be given the final injection. It is a large syringe of green liquid, and it takes effect very quickly. While this is all happening, you are welcome to be talking to your dog in a soothing voice and patting your dog as they pass away. Once your dog passes, they may also empty their bladder or bowels or might have some muscle spasms. The vet will check that their heart has stopped beating, and it may take a few minutes after the body is still for your dog to be confirmed dead.

Depending on local laws, the vets can either leave the body for you to bury or might take the body for cremation, either public cremation or private, where you can have the ashes returned at a later date. You might want to have a trusted friend with you for the procedure and might like your other family members or pets to be there to see the process so that they can share in some understanding and say farewell.

I was a support person for a friend whose elderly labrador passed away last year. The vets were incredibly respectful and laid out a blanket on her dog’s bed so that when she passed, they wrapped her in the blanket to carry her out. My friend chose it in the yard instead of inside the home. I helped to manage the other bouncy dog in the household, feed treats and gave cuddles to the old girl. I was honoured to be present for such a momentous occasion as a life passing from our world. We both felt stunned afterwards, and we sat down to a cup of tea while we mentally processed our emotions. It was very special and, of course, very sad and difficult.

Thank you to those who have been brave enough to read this far, and I encourage you to speak to your networks so you move into that space with a little more preparation when the time comes.

Links - This is not an exhaustive list. Please explore in more detail your own needs in your area.

Vets who provide in-home euthanasia

<https://thekindestgoodbye.com.au/> Australia-wide. Contact to confirm there is someone in your area.

<https://www.mybestfriendonline.com.au/> Melbourne, Victoria.

<https://sunsetvets.com.au/our-locations/> East coast QLD, NSW and soon to Melbourne.

Bereavement services

<https://petsandpeople.com.au/> Counselling (fees apply) specialising in pet loss. The website includes a resource tab. Can provide counselling remotely or face to face, depending on location.

<http://drvanessarohlf.com.au> Vanessa is a consultant, therapist, and educator specialising in stress management, compassion fatigue, pet loss, and animal bereavement for animal caregivers. Melbourne, Victoria.

Additional informative articles

<https://drvanessarohlf.com.au/2018/07/27/pet-euthanasia-making-tough-decision/>

<https://drvanessarohlf.com.au/2018/07/18/preparing-say-goodbye-8-ways-prepare-cope-pet-loss/>

<https://toegrips.com/quality-of-life-scale-dogs/> (linked to earlier in this article).

## DGHA information

### How to Join DGHA.

There are two categories of DGHA memberships. Full membership: $20.00. Any Australian who is blind or vision impaired and who is a Dog Guide Handler Associate Membership: $10.00. Any other person who is sighted, blind or vision impaired and supports the objectives of DGHA.

If you are not already a member of DGHA and wish to be, please visit our website and fill in the accessible membership form. We welcome full memberships for Dog Guide handlers and associate memberships from Dog Guide trainers, puppy raisers and friends and family of Dog Guide handlers.  The joining page on our website is at  <http://dgha.org.au/dgha/membership/>

### Sign up for this newsletter

If you know someone who may be interested in receiving this newsletter, for example, a new Dog Guide handler, a puppy raiser or your instructor, please send their email address to us (with their permission) by reply email or to [dgha@dgha.org.au](dgha%40dgha.org.au), and we’ll add them to our list.

\*\*Contribute to this newsletter. We welcome your input into this newsletter.  If you have a story, an idea, or a review of a doggy product you love, don't hesitate to contact Stephanie by emailing [newsletter@dgha.org.au](newsletter%40dgha.org.au%C2%A0)email address to discuss your contribution.

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### \*\*Disclaimer:

Views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or DGHA. Any advice is general in nature and should be checked with relevant schools, your vet or other relevant authorities.