Cardholder Handbook

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Companion Card® is a registered trade mark of the State of Victoria.

Further information and copies of the Victorian Companion Card Cardholder Handbook are available from the Companion Card website at:

www.companioncard.org.au

or telephone the Victorian Companion Card Information Line on:

Telephone: 1800 650 611
TTY: 1800 898 888
National Relay Service: 13 36 77
Speech to Speech Relay Service: 1300 555 727

The State Government of Victoria would like to acknowledge the many individuals, community groups, businesses and industry peak bodies that have contributed to the development and implementation of the Companion Card program.
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Why has the Companion Card been developed?

The Victorian Network On Recreation and Disability (VICNORD) developed the concept of a Companion Card in response to continued concern from people with a disability, who found the pricing policies of many entertainment, leisure and recreation venues/activities to be discriminatory.

People with a disability, who are unable to attend community venues and activities without attendant care support, have a right to equal participation in the community. This fundamental right is protected under section 42 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) and Section 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth). Both these Acts make it unlawful to discriminate against a person who requires the assistance of a companion.

In the past, a person with a disability who needed attendant care type support from a companion in order to participate at most venues/activities in the community, has sometimes been required to pay two admission and/or booking fees; one for themselves and one for their companion.

This practice is discriminatory because it has the effect of increasing the admission and/or booking price for the person with a disability.

A number of venue/activity operators attempted to address this inequity and allowed free admission for companions. Until the introduction of the Companion Card, these organisations did not have a simple and consistent method to identify who may legitimately require a companion.

The Companion Card has been developed to promote the rights of people with a disability to fair ticketing. It is not a discount scheme, concession or benefit.
Graham’s Story

“My name is Graham Wilson. Since receiving my Companion Card I have been able to do more of the things that I really enjoy like going to concerts, theatre shows and the cricket.

A couple of highlights were to see the Rolling Stones and the Eagles in concert.

I am a quadriplegic as a result of an accident. This means that I need someone with me most of the time to provide assistance. Not having to pay for two tickets wherever I go makes a big difference to my life. It means I can afford to do things that I otherwise would not do.

Booking tickets has also become much easier. Previously I would often have to negotiate a ticket for my carer with every place I wanted to go. Now I just present my Companion Card and a ticket is issued for my carer at no charge.

I also use the Companion Card on the train and tram when travelling to Melbourne from my home in Ballarat.

I really appreciate having a Companion Card and it feels great to have more choice about where I can go and who with. Hopefully Pink Floyd tour Australia soon!”
What is the Companion Card?

The Companion Card identifies the cardholder as a person who has a significant disability and is not able to attend activities and events without attendant care type support.

The Card can be presented when booking or purchasing tickets. Participating (“affiliate”) businesses will accept the Companion Card and will issue the cardholder with a second ticket for their companion at no charge.

The Companion Card is a tool to assist organisations to comply with existing anti-discrimination legislation. Businesses that accept the Companion Card and issue a second companion ticket at no charge are not reimbursed for their participation.
Where can I use the Companion Card?

A list of venues and events that have formally agreed to accept the Companion Card is available at the companion card website: www.companioncard.org.au

Look for the distinctive Companion Card logo displayed at the entrance of business premises or on their promotional and advertising material. You can even use your card interstate.

Who is a Companion?

A companion may be a paid or unpaid person whose primary purpose is to provide attendant care type support to enable the cardholder to access an activity or event.

Cardholders can choose whom they wish to have as their companion, and this may vary depending on the activity and the occasion.

What is attendant care?

Attendant care type support includes significant assistance with mobility, communication, self-care, or learning, planning and thinking, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies do not enable the person to carry out these tasks independently. It does not include providing only reassurance, social company or encouragement.

Some venue and activity operators may not know about the Companion Card but may still accept your card if you show it to them or tell them about it. If there is a venue or activity that you wish to attend you should ask if they will accept your Companion Card.

The back of your card provides a website address and a telephone number for venue and activity operators to access more information about the Companion Card and to find out how to affiliate with the program.
Who is the Companion Card for?

In summary, you can apply for a Victorian Companion Card if you can demonstrate all of the following:

1. You live in Victoria; and
2. You have a significant disability; and
3. Due to the impact of your disability, you are unable to participate at most community venues or activities without attendant care type support; and
4. Your need for this level of support will be life long.

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 these venues?

The Companion Card is issued to people who require attendant care type support at most activities. The Card was not developed to overcome or compensate for lack of accessibility including; the absence of ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, appropriate signage or captioning, etc. Responsibility for these access issues remains with venue and activity operators. You may be able to contact these operators directly to discuss your requirements.

What if my condition is episodic?

The Companion Card program will consider applications from people whose conditions are episodic (for example, Multiple Sclerosis, Epilepsy, Schizophrenia, etc.). Cards will only be issued if the need for a companion is in most circumstances and cannot be managed by treatment, medication, aids etc. Please provide information in your application about the type and frequency of episodes, the residual effects and the success of any treatment or medications.

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

My child is only 4 years old. Are there any age limits on who can apply for a Companion Card?

Most children require assistance from someone to access community activities and events. Whilst there are no age limits on who can receive a Companion Card, applicants must demonstrate that their need for attendant care is likely to be life-long. If your child’s condition is subject to improvement and they are likely to access the community independently as an adult, they will not be issued a Companion Card. You may, however, be able to negotiate your child’s current care requirements directly with venue and activity operators.

I have recently sustained an injury and now require attendant care. I am undergoing treatment and therapy in hope that I might become more independent in the future. Will I be issued a Companion Card?

Companion Cards will not be issued if you may become independent in the future as a result of treatment, management, training, recovery or developmental
improvements. Companion Cards can only be issued when a life-long need for a companion can be demonstrated. It may be best to wait until you have completed your rehabilitation or recovery to see if you have an ongoing need for attendant care type support.

I work full-time and earn a good income. Does this prevent me from receiving a Companion Card?

There are no income or assets tests applied to applications for a Companion Card, and people may apply irrespective of their employment or financial status.

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

Companion Cards are issued only in the name of the person who has a disability. This enables the cardholder to choose their companion in each instance. Cards are not issued to facilities, organisations or companions.

I live outside Victoria. Can I still apply for a card?

The Victorian Companion Card program will only process applications from Victorian residents. The program operates in all Australian states and territories. Participating businesses will accept Companion Cards from any state or territory.

Visit www.companioncard.org.au for more information on the Companion Card in your home state or territory.

How do I apply?

An application form must be completed. Application forms can be downloaded from: www.companioncard.org.au or you can telephone 1800 650 611 to ask for a form to be posted to you. Please do not use a photocopied application form.

You and your Health Professional will be asked to provide some personal details as well as information about your diagnosis and the specific attendant care that you require. You will be required to attach photographs to your application and have both your photos and your form signed by a Service Provider or Health Professional.

Complete your application as thoroughly as possible. If you or your Health Professional have any questions about the application form or process, please telephone the Companion Card Information Line on 1800 650 611.

You will be notified of the outcome of your application in writing.

If you don't provide enough detail, further information about your need for attendant care may be obtained in the following ways:

- A written “Request for Further Information” may be sent to you.

- Any of the Health Professionals or Service Providers indicated on your application may be telephoned to clarify your eligibility for a Companion Card.

- The program may obtain relevant information from government and agency databases to assess your eligibility for a Companion Card.

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What if I do not qualify to receive a Companion Card?

There may be circumstances whereby a person may use the support of a companion but will not qualify to receive a Companion Card. Some examples may include:

• A person whose expected development, management or recovery may mean that they will not require attendant care at most venues for the rest of their life;

• A person experiencing a temporary impairment;

• A person who is affected by the specific inaccessibility of a particular venue;

• A person who chooses to have a companion to provide social company or reassurance, etc;

• A person whose requirement for attendant care is infrequent.

In situations such as these, it is up to the individual and the venue or activity operators to negotiate companion access.

Review of a decision

If your application has been declined you can seek a review.

It is not necessary to complete a new application, nor any other form.

Please notify the Companion Card program of your request for a review in writing and provide any additional information (which may include letters, reports, assessments, etc.) to:

Companion Card Review
GPO Box 4987
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

You must have one of the Health Professionals, listed on the application form, sign any new information and provide their contact details for verification. Please note that original documents cannot be returned to you.

Any new information you provide, along with the information obtained in your original application, will be considered as part of the review.

Applicants are notified of the outcome of their review in writing.
Replacement Cards
You can request a replacement card if -
• You lose your Companion Card;
• Your Companion Card is stolen or damaged;
• You change your name;
• Your photograph needs to be up-dated.

To request a replacement card, you will need to complete a Replacement / Change of Details form.
Copies of this form are available from our website or telephone 1800 650 611.

Change of contact details
If you wish to update your address and telephone numbers, please contact the Companion Card Information Line on 1800 650 611.

To ensure that your renewed Companion Card is issued to you before the expiry date, please keep your details up to date.

Renewal of Companion Cards
You will receive a Renewal Notification letter four months prior to the expiration of your current card and you will be required to complete a Renewal Cardholder Application Form.

If your card has expired and you have not received your Renewal Notification Letter and Renewal Cardholder Application Form, you can telephone the Companion Card Information Line on 1800 650 611.

Issues resolution
If you have a complaint about recognition of your Companion Card, or issues regarding access or unfair treatment at venues/activities, you should seek to resolve the issue with the venue/activity management in the first instance.

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive from the venue/activity, you may like to contact one of the disability advocacy organisations or community legal services in your area. Some of these are listed on the Victorian Companion Card website.
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 the 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 needs more than one companion to provide attendant care support, the cardholder must negotiate this with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.

8. 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.

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 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 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.

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**Getting more information about the Companion Card**

**The Companion Card website**

www.companioncard.org.au

This website provides:

- Information about the Companion Card;
- A list of places the Card can be used;
- Translations of key information;
- Answers to frequently asked questions; and
- Information about the Companion Card in other states and territories.

Copies of this handbook, the application form, and a range of other Companion Card forms can also be downloaded from the website.
The Companion Card Information Line

Telephone 1800 650 611

Contact the Companion Card Information Line during business hours if you:

• Would like to discuss the Companion Card in greater detail;
• Would like assistance with your application; or
• Wish to order copies of this handbook or other Companion Card forms.

If you have a hearing impairment or a complex communication need, telephone:

The Companion Card TTY on 1800 898 888
The National Relay Service on 13 36 77
The Speech-to-Speech Relay Service on 1300 555 727

or email us at: companioncard@health.vic.gov.au

Information in other formats

This handbook is available in various formats.

To obtain a copy in the format you require, visit:

www.companioncard.org.au
or telephone 1800 650 611

Information in other languages

This handbook is available in various languages.

To obtain a copy in the language that you require, visit the Companion Card website or telephone the Companion Card Information Line.

If you need an interpreter, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 and ask them to telephone COMPANION CARD on 1800-650-611.

Our business hours are Monday to Friday between 9:00am to 5:00pm (closed on Public Holidays).