



## ACO ADVISORIES

# SERVICE ANIMAL

Effective April 25, 2025



ALBERTA college  
of OPTOMETRISTS

# Service Animal Advisory

## Service Animal Advisory for Optometry Clinics in Alberta

In accordance with the **Alberta Human Rights Act** and the **Service Dogs Act**, individuals with disabilities have the right to be accompanied by their service animals in all public areas, including healthcare settings such as optometry clinics.

### Service Animal Access:

1. **Rights of Individuals:** Patients with disabilities are permitted to bring their service animals into the clinic. This includes animals trained to perform specific tasks for their handler, such as guiding individuals with visual impairments or assisting with mobility needs.
2. **Identification of Service Animals:** Service animals are typically identifiable by their behavior, uniform, or a vest. While some service animals wear specific identification, others may not have visible markings, but they are still recognized under the law.
3. **Animal Behavior:** The service animal must be under the control of its handler at all times. If the animal becomes disruptive or behaves in a manner that poses a risk to the health or safety of others, the clinic has the right to ask that the animal be removed from the premises.
4. **Exclusions:** Animals that are not trained service animals or pets (such as emotional support animals) do not have the same legal access rights to healthcare settings.

### Responsibilities of the Optometry Clinic:

- Optometry clinics are required to provide a welcoming environment for service animals and their handlers.
- Staff should be trained to understand the rights of patients with service animals and be prepared to assist as needed without causing distress or disruption to the patient.
- Optometry clinics reserve the right to request for the identification card which identifies the disabled person and their service dog
- Clinics must ensure that their policies and physical space are accessible and accommodating to individuals with disabilities and their service animals.

### Exceptions and Considerations:

- **Health and Safety:**
  - In certain clinical or operational situations (such as in procedures or exams where an animal's presence could interfere with safety), accommodations may be offered, such as virtual care, separate rooms or specific times to visit with the animal.
  - If the clinic determines that a service animal poses a danger or threat to anyone on the premises, it reserves the right to request the owner to remove the animal immediately.
- **Other Animals:** Emotional support animals and other non-service animals are not covered by these rights and may not have automatic access to the clinic. Clinical judgment may be used to decide how an emotional support animal can safely accompany a patient or whether other care options should be considered.

**Clinic Best Practices:**

- Ensure that waiting areas and exam rooms are equipped to accommodate patients with service animals.
- Develop a policy outlining the clinic's stance on service animals, ensuring staff are well-informed and patients are treated respectfully and in accordance with the law.
- Offer assistance or alternative solutions for patients who may need specific accommodations related to their service animal, such as seating arrangements or ensuring that the animal is comfortable during examinations.
- Optometry clinics cannot require patients with certified assistance animals to find alternative care arrangements just because the clinic has a "no animals" policy.

By adhering to these guidelines, optometry clinics can ensure compliance with Alberta's accessibility standards and foster an inclusive, respectful environment for all patients.

**Acknowledgements:**

College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta: Animals in Medical Clinics

References: Government of Alberta, Services Dogs Act