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What is the Companion Card?

The Companion Card program is a not for profit program funded by the NSW Government.

A Companion Card is for people with significant and permanent disability that need a carer with them at all times to participate in community based activities and venues. It aims to promote the rights of people with disability to fair ticketing and make community access and participation more affordable.

The card itself is the size of a credit card, with the name and a photo of the holder – who is the person with disability. When the holder buys a ticket for themselves at participating venues and facilities, their companion will get free entry.

Companion Cards are not means tested and those assessed as eligible have the card for life.

The Companion Card belongs to the person with disability so they can choose who supports and assists them.

Who is eligible?

You may be eligible for a Companion Card if:

1. you are an Australian citizen or resident, and live in NSW; and
2. you are a person with a significant and permanent disability; and
3. you are unable to participate at most community venues or activities without attendant care support; and
4. aids and other technologies do not meet your attendant care needs; and
5. your need for this level of attendant care will be life-long.

Examples of situations where a person may not be eligible for a card include:

» when the person is experiencing temporary disability
» where the need for attendant care support is not lifelong
» when the person only requires attendant care because a particular venue is not accessible.

A Companion Card is issued in the name of the person who has the disability. Facilities, organisations or potential companions are not eligible to apply for a Companion Card.

The Companion Card is issued to people who will require attendant care type support at most activities for the rest of their life. A Companion Card cannot be issued to a person who is likely to become independent in the future as a result of treatment, rehabilitation, management, training, recovery, or developmental improvement.
Where can I use a Companion Card?

The Companion Card can be used with any of the affiliates, such as venues, events and transport providers that have officially registered to participate in the program.


Look for the distinctive Companion Card logo displayed by affiliates at their premises or on their promotional material or website.

Some venue and activity operators may not know about Companion Card but may still accept the card when informed of the program.

It is important to note that under existing anti-discrimination legislation the overall responsibility for ensuring equal access to goods, services and facilities remains with the venue and activity owners and operators.

The Card was not developed to compensate for lack of accessibility such as; the absence of ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, appropriate signage or captioning, etc. Responsibility for these access issues remains with venue and activity operators.

The Companion Card program does not guarantee the physical accessibility of affiliate venues and activities.

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 planning, where the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies do not enable the person to carry out these tasks independently.

Attendant care does not include providing reassurance or encouragement nor can it be for infrequent or unexpected events or medical emergencies.

The Companion Card cannot be issued to people who only require attendant care for social support, reassurance, encouragement or just-in-case-type of scenarios.
How to apply for a Companion Card?

Applicants must complete a written application form which includes:

» two identical colour passport photographs (a current head and shoulder photograph for display on the card)
» verification of the application and photographs by a service provider or health professional (a guide is available to these professionals)
» signing the applicant declaration which includes agreeing to the cardholder terms and conditions.

There are no income or asset tests, nor are there fees associated with the application process.

Cardholder application forms may be downloaded from the Companion Card website at www.companioncard.nsw.gov.au. Application forms are also available on request by contacting our information line 1800 893 044 or by emailing info.companioncard@facs.nsw.gov.au.

All applications must be submitted in hard copy with original signatures and signed photographs. The photographs must be clear, current head and shoulder passport photographs, with a plain background.

Once the application form is complete it should be mailed to:

Companion Card,
Locked Bag 4028
Ashfield NSW 1800

Original applications and photographs will not be returned.

Assessment of applications

Each application is assessed against the program’s five eligibility criteria.

If more information is needed to process applications, NSW Companion Card may:

» follow-up with an enquiry to the service provider or health professional who verified the application.
» contact the applicant (or authorised contact) to ask for additional information

All persons applying for a Companion Card will be notified of the outcome of the application in writing.

Please note that completion of an application form does not guarantee a Companion Card will be issued.

Each application is assessed individually against the eligibility criteria in a way that is efficient, fair and consistent and minimises unnecessary stress and inconvenience to applicants and/or their carers.
Unsuccessful applications and the review process

If your application for a NSW Companion Card is unsuccessful there are two options:

**Option 1: Provide new information about your application**

If you provide new information about your application, NSW Companion Card will consider this information and determine whether to uphold or overturn the original decision. You will be notified of the outcome in writing with 10 working days.

If the original decision is overturned, you will be issued with a Companion Card.

**Option 2: Independent Review**

If new information is not provided OR the original decision to decline is upheld after new information has been provided you may request an independent review.

A request for review should be made in writing to:

✉️ Applications.companioncard@facs.nsw.gov.au

OR

✉️ Companion Card Review
Locked Bag 4028
ASHFIELD NSW 1800

The request for a review will be acknowledged in writing by NSW Companion Card.

If you request an independent review, NSW Companion Card will forward a copy of your application and any supporting documentation to independent expert/s for specialist advice and final determination. These can include a range of independent allied health specialists and advisors from within the NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

You will be informed in writing of the outcome of the review.

If the original decision to decline is overturned, you will be issued with a Companion Card.

If the original decision to decline is upheld by the independent expert/s, the letter will outline the process undertaken and the reason/s for the decision.

The decision made by the independent expert/s process is final. However, if your circumstances change (e.g. attendant care needs increase or mobility decreases) you may re-apply for a Companion Card at any time.
Using a Companion Card

The program’s cardholder terms and conditions (below) outline the use of the Companion Card.

A Companion Card must only be used when the cardholder requires the assistance of a companion to participate at a particular venue or activity.

Cardholders must inform the business affiliate of their requirement for a companion ticket at the time they book or purchase their own ticket. Where a cardholder has a requirement for more than one companion, the cardholder must negotiate this with the business affiliate at the time of booking.

The Companion Card must be presented when booking or buying a ticket. Participating businesses will issue the cardholder with a second ‘companion ticket’ for their chosen companion at no charge. The companion ticket cannot be used without the cardholder being present.

The Companion Card can be used in conjunction with any recognised concession cards held by the cardholder.

Cardholders are encouraged to:
» ask about the Companion Card program when booking a ticket
» look for the Companion Card logo when buying a ticket to a venue or activity
» search for current businesses, venues and activities that have formally agreed to accept the Companion Card by checking the Companion Card website at [www.companioncard.nsw.gov.au](http://www.companioncard.nsw.gov.au).

Replacement cards

You can request a replacement card if:
» you lose your Companion Card
» your Companion Card is due to expire soon
» your Companion Card is expired
» your Companion Card is stolen or damaged
» you change your name
» your photograph on the card requires updating.

Business affiliates

Strong support from the business sector is vital to the success of the NSW Companion Card program. Any business or organisation that charges an admission or participation fee is encouraged to consider affiliating with the program.

Businesses can register to affiliate with the program by completing the Industry affiliation form.

Affiliation with the program is free, and the costs associated with providing a companion ticket must be absorbed by the business or organisation.

Affiliates agree to:

» issue a minimum of one companion ticket at no charge to cardholders
» accept a Companion Card issued in any Australian state or territory

» have their business details listed on the national Companion Card website
» abide by the Companion Card affiliate terms and conditions.

Cardholders or their companions are encouraged to raise awareness about the program with businesses. The contact details for the program are displayed on the back of the card.

Business participation in the program is voluntary. Suggestions about potential new affiliates are welcomed and may be provided to the program by emailing www.companioncard.nsw.gov.au.

OUR BUSINESS AFFILIATES

AFL | AMF | Event | Dingo Dubs | Eastern Show | Taronga Zoo | Theme Park Sydney
Frequently Asked Questions

**Q** How much does a Companion Card cost?

A. Companion Cards are issued free of charge. However, the applicant must supply two colour photographs of passport quality which they must obtain at their own cost.

**Q** Is there an age restriction?

A. No, there is no age restriction, but the Companion Card program is all about ‘fair ticketing’. The cardholder must be of an age where they are charged an entry fee and must have a lifelong need for a carer.

Generally children up to a certain age require a parent/supervisor to perform functions that are often similar to that of a companion. A Companion Card may only be issued where the companion is required due to the disability (not due to age alone).

A card cannot be issued if a child may become independent in the future as a result of:

- early intervention therapy
- the use of aids, equipment or alternative strategies
- developmental improvement.

**Q** 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?

A. No. The Companion Card was not developed to overcome or compensate for any particular venue’s lack of accessibility, including the absence of ramps, lifts or accessible toilets.

Responsibility for these access issues remains with venue and activity operators.

**Q** What if my condition is episodic?

A. The Companion Card program will consider applications from people whose conditions are episodic (for example, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, schizophrenia, etc.) on a case-by-case basis.

A card will only be issued if a carer is needed in most circumstances and support needs cannot be managed by treatment, medication or aids.

Information regarding the type and frequency of episodes, the residual effects and details about proposed treatment options should be included in the application.

**Q** I feel better if I have a carer to support me in the community. Should I apply for a card?

A. Companion Cards are for people with disability who require their carer to assist with tasks including mobility, self-care, communication and planning.

If you are able to perform these tasks independently, with the assistance of aids and equipment, then you may not be eligible for a Companion Card.

**Q** I work fulltime. Does this prevent me from receiving a Companion Card?

A. No. There is no income or assets test for the Companion Card.
Q I am a manager of a disability service. Are services able to be issued a Companion Card?

A. No. Companion Cards are only issued in the name of the person with disability. The person with disability is then able to choose their carer in each instance.

Q Can someone else complete the application on my behalf?

A. Yes, anyone can complete the form on your behalf or assist you. However, the information entered is still about you. If someone does assist you, please include their contact details in the application.

Q How are applicants assessed for a Companion Card?

A. NSW Companion Card will consider all of the information provided with the application when deciding whether the applicant is eligible for a Companion Card.

If further information is required, NSW Companion Card will contact the health professional or service provider that signed the application form and/or the applicant.

Each application is assessed individually against the eligibility criteria in a way that is efficient, fair and consistent and minimises unnecessary stress and inconvenience to applicants and/or their carers.

Q What supporting information does NSW Companion Card require with the application to make an informed decision?

A. Any relevant supporting information such as contact details of support services (e.g. day programs, respite services) and copies of current reports from treating health professionals, will assist in determining eligibility.

Q I am going on holiday can I use the card in another State?

A. Yes. The Companion Card is recognised at affiliates listed throughout Australia. Visit www.companioncard.org.au for registered affiliates throughout Australia.

Q I have a NDIS package – does this mean I will be issued a Companion Card?

A. Not everyone who receives NDIS funding will be eligible for a Companion Card.

Only people who will require a high level of support for the rest of their life are eligible for a Companion Card. Some people who get support from the NDIS may need a high level of support now, but may need less help in the future as they learn to become more independent.

If you have an NDIS plan and would like to apply for a Companion Card it is important that you still send any copies of reports you might have about your disability as this will help us assess your application.

In your application you can tell us about the help you need now, but also remember to tell us why you will need a high level of support for the rest of your life.
Companion Card 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. If you have previously attended an activity independently, this arrangement should continue.

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 a 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 with one Companion Ticket, or admission, at no charge. This ticket will be exempt from all booking fees.

7. Where a cardholder requires more than one companion, this must be negotiated by the cardholder, with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking. Note: providing a second carer’s ticket is at the discretion of the venue/activity operator.

8. The Companion Card can be used to obtain admission for any programs, services and sessions run by affiliate 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. Affiliate 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. fee for rides in addition to an entry fee at a fun park). Affiliate venues/activities must issue a Companion Ticket for both admission and additional components if the cardholder determines they require assistance in order to participate.

13. Companion Cards may be used to purchase a package deal for the cardholder 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, e.g. 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 affiliate venue/activity.

15. If an affiliate venue/activity operator suspects that a Companion Card is being misused, the affiliate can report this to the Companion Card program. Proven misuse of the Companion Card may result in cancellation of the card, and the cardholder will be ineligible to reapply.

16. The Companion Card identifies the cardholder as a person who has a significant permanent disability for the purpose of the Companion Card program but cannot be used as a form of identification for any other purpose.