Cardholder Handbook

Free Call
1800 893 044
June 2011

Further information and copies of the Companion Card NSW Cardholder Handbook are available from the Companion Card NSW web page at:

www.nswcompanioncard.org.au

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The State Government of NSW 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 NSW program.

Cover: Kylie Warner and Jan Daisley
Fiora Sacco Photography
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About this Handbook

This handbook is intended to assist you to understand how the Companion Card® program works. It may help you to decide if you should apply for a Companion Card.

The handbook provides details of your rights and responsibilities as a cardholder. In addition, the handbook explains how to access forms and additional information, and lists other resources which may be helpful.

You should read this handbook before completing the application form. It is recommended that you keep this handbook in case you need to refer to it later.

Description of Terms

“Cardholder” – refers to a person, with disability, whose application for a Companion Card has been successful and whose photograph and details appear on a Companion Card.

“Companion” – This program uses the term “companion” to describe a paid or unpaid assistant or carer who provides attendant care type support to a cardholder, to enable that person to participate at most community activities and events.

“Affiliate” – is used to describe organisations, businesses and outlets that charge an admission or participation fee, and have officially registered that they will accept the Companion Card. NSW-based industries, including those with national operations or outlets, are eligible to become Affiliates.

“Companion Ticket” – is a second ticket or admission issued for a companion, at no charge, when it is essential for the cardholder to receive attendant care type support in order to participate at a venue/activity.
Jan’s Story

“I received my Companion Card in early March this year and I have used it many times since. In the past my community access was restricted due to the fact I had to pay not only my way, but my carers’ way also, which made it very expensive. Since receiving the Companion Card I have used it on Public Transport including ferries and the RiverCat service; I have also been to the movies several times and to date I haven’t blown my budget. I am looking forward to visiting Taronga Park Zoo, the Sydney Aquarium at Darling Harbour and various sporting events. Other venues such as the Sydney Royal Easter Show and other live entertainment events held throughout the year are also on my to do list.”

“The Companion Card is a wonderful initiative which has made community access more affordable for people with disability like myself and their companions (carers). I know many people who are house bound due to financial limitations, the Companion Card program should now open many doors for people with disability who were previously unable to access social activities in the community.”
**Why has the Companion Card been developed?**

The introduction of the Companion Card program in NSW is an initiative under the NSW Government’s Department of Family & Community Services, Aging, Disability & Home Care (ADHC). The program is managed by National Disability Services (NDS).

The Victorian Network On Recreation and Disability (VICNORD) developed the concept of a Companion Card in response to continued concern from people with disability, who found the pricing policies of many entertainment, leisure and recreation venues/activities to be discriminatory. The Companion Card program is now operating in several states around Australia and cardholders may use their cards interstate – visit the Companion Card National website www.companioncard.gov.au for updates on which states and organisations participate in the program.

People with disability, who are unable to attend community venues and activities without attendant care type support, have a right to equal participation in the community. This fundamental right is protected under Section 4A of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW) and Section 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth). Both Acts make it unlawful to discriminate against a person with disability who requires the assistance of a companion.

In the past, a person with disability who needed attendant care type support from a companion in order to participate at most venues/activities in the community, had 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 doubling the admission and/or booking price for the person with disability.

A number of venue/activity operators have attempted to address this inequity and have 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 existing right of people with disability to fair ticketing. It is not a discount scheme, concession or benefit.

The Companion Card is a tool to assist organisations to comply with existing anti-discrimination legislation.

The Companion Card is a not for profit program. Administration of the program is funded by the NSW Government through National Disability Services.

**What is the Companion Card?**

The Companion Card identifies the cardholder as a person who has a significant permanent 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.
Who is the Companion Card for?

In summary, you can apply for a card if you can demonstrate:

1. You live in NSW, or you reside in NSW under a valid visa; and
2. You have a severe or profound disability; and
3. Due to the impact of your disability, you would be unable to participate at most community venues or activities without significant assistance with mobility, communication, self care, planning; and
4. The use of aids and other technologies does not meet those needs; and
5. Your need for this level of support will be life-long.

The Companion Card is for people with a significant and permanent disability, who are unable to participate at most community venues and activities without a companion to provide attendant care type support, for the rest of their life.

The Companion Card is not issued to every person who has a disability.

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 any particular venue’s 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 community facilities and activities have ticketing policies that require children under a specific age to be supervised by an adult. Whilst there are no age limits on who can receive a Companion Card, applicants must demonstrate that their need for attendant care type support 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 the 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 is 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 the disability. This enables the cardholder to choose their companion in each instance. Cards are not issued to facilities, organisations or companions.

I live outside of NSW. Can I still apply for a Companion Card?
The Companion Card NSW program will only process applications from NSW residents. The program operates in a number of states and territories. Participating businesses will accept Companion Cards from any state.

Visit the National website www.companioncard.gov.au for more information on the Companion Card in your home state.

Who is a companion?
A companion may be a paid or unpaid person whose attendant care type support is essential in order for the cardholder to be able to access an activity or event. The cardholder can choose whom they wish to have as their companion, and this may vary depending on the activity and the occasion.

A person is not considered a companion if they are only required for reassurance, social company or encouragement; or if they are present to compensate for a particular venue’s lack of accessibility.

How is the Card used?
The Companion Card can be presented when booking or purchasing a ticket, provided the cardholder requires attendant care type support from a companion in order to access that particular venue or activity. Participating (“Affiliate”) organisations will recognise the Companion Card and will issue the cardholder with a second ticket for their companion at no charge.

Cardholders can only use their card to receive a Companion Ticket if they cannot access or participate at that particular venue or activity without attendant care type support from a companion. If a cardholder previously attended an activity independently, this arrangement should continue, unchanged.

The success and expansion of the Companion Card is, in part, dependent upon the good will of both cardholders and Affiliates. Cardholders must only use their card if attendant care type support is required for that particular activity or event. Attempts to use the Companion Card when a companion is not required may jeopardise the willingness of industries to participate in the program, and may result in the cancellation of the cardholder’s card.

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

Affiliates are organisations, businesses and outlets that charge an admission or participation fee, and officially register to participate in the Companion Card program. NSW-based industries, including those with national operations or outlets, are eligible to become Affiliates.

The Companion Card program has been developed with an initial focus on recreation, leisure, social and cultural venues/activities. Other industries may also choose to participate in the program. Look for the distinctive Companion Card logo displayed by Affiliates at the entrance of business premises or on their promotional and advertising material.

A directory of organisations that accept the Companion Card will not be published. Please visit the NSW program web page www.nswcompanioncard.org.au or the National website www.companioncard.gov.au for a listing of Affiliates.

If there is a venue or activity that you wish to attend, it is your responsibility to check with the venue, at the time of booking your tickets, if they will accept your Companion Card. Some venue/activity operators may not know about the Companion Card (or may not display the logo), but may still accept your card if it is presented or when informed about the program. The back of the card provides details for accessing more information about the Companion Card and how an Affiliate may join the program. It is anticipated that by raising awareness in this way, many more organisations and businesses will participate in the program and thus recognise the rights of people who require a companion to provide attendant care type support.

How do I determine if my disability and need for a companion is permanent?

Permanent disabilities are those that will be present or are likely to be present for the rest of your life, even if the effects of the disability may fluctuate.

Disabilities that are not likely to continue for the rest of your life are not regarded as permanent, even though they may persist over long periods of time.

A permanent need for a companion means that you will require a companion for the rest of your life, to provide attendant care type support so that you can participate at most venues and activities. Applicants with conditions that are subject to change or improvement may not be able to demonstrate a life-long need for a companion, and therefore may not be eligible for a Companion Card.
How much does it cost?
Companion Cards are issued free of charge.

How do I apply?
An application form must be completed and submitted to the Companion Card NSW program. Please telephone the Companion Card NSW Information Line Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au to request that an application form be posted to you. Application forms can also be downloaded from the Companion Card NSW web page www.nswcompanioncard.org.au

Read the application form carefully and follow the prompts that have been provided on the form. You should complete your application as thoroughly as possible. If you have any questions about the application form or process, please telephone the Companion Card NSW Information Line Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au

You will need to submit two, identical colour, passport photographs with your application. The photographs must be a front view of your head and shoulders.

The photograph must be clear and current as your photograph will be printed on the Card and will be used by venue/activity operators to identify you as the cardholder. A venue/activity operator may refuse to issue a Companion Ticket if the photograph on your card does not look like you. The photographs must be a front view of your head and shoulders only.

Photographs will not be returned to you, regardless of the outcome of your application.

The photographs, along with your completed application form, need to be signed by a relevant service provider or health professional who can verify that the photographs represent you and that the information contained in the application form is correct.

The application form indicates which service provider or health professional may sign your application form. The service provider or health professional can only sign your application form if they are confident of the accuracy of the information contained within it. To assist your application, ask a professional who knows you well or who you believe is able to assess your need for a companion to provide attendant care type support. Applicants are encouraged to schedule a separate appointment with their relevant professional to discuss their application form.

The people involved in your application are likely to be contacted to verify the accuracy of the information you provide. There are penalties for anyone providing any false information in a Companion Card application.

If Companion Card NSW does not have enough information to determine if you are eligible for a Companion Card, further information about your need for attendant care type support may be sought in the following ways:

- A written “Request for Further Information” may be sent to you or your agent
- A follow up telephone call may be made to any of the service providers or health professionals indicated on your application form to clarify your eligibility
- Information held in databases by Government departments and agencies that is relevant to assessing or verifying your eligibility may be obtained

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application in writing.
What if I do not qualify to receive a Companion Card?

The Companion Card is not issued to every person who has a disability.

The Companion Card will only be issued to people who meet all of the eligibility criteria for the program. There may be circumstances whereby a person may require a companion but does not qualify to receive a Companion Card. Examples include:

- a person experiencing a temporary disability
- a person whose expected development or recovery may mean that they will not require a companion in the future
- a person who is affected by the specific inaccessibility of a particular venue
- a person who chooses to have a companion to provide social support or reassurance
- a person who chooses to have a companion rather than use available aids, equipment or alternative strategies to access an event without attendant care type support
- a person whose requirement for attendant care type support is infrequent

In situations such as these, it is up to the individual and the venue/activity operators to negotiate an alternative method to verify the need for companion access.

Appealing a decision

If your application has been declined you can seek a review if:

- Your circumstances change and/or
- You are able to provide new information that clearly demonstrates you meet the Companion Card eligibility criteria.

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

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

External Appeal Committee,
Companion Card
GPO Box 2687,
Sydney NSW 2001

You must have one of the Health Professionals as 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 forwarded to a panel for its consideration.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their review in writing.

Replacement Cards

You may 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 updated.

To request a replacement card, you will need to complete a Replacement / Change of Details form and submit this to the Companion Card NSW program.

To obtain a Replacement / Change of Details Form, telephone the Companion Card NSW Information Line Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au to request that a form be posted to you.

Change of contact details

To advise changes to any of your contact details you will need to complete a Replacement/Change of
Details form and submit this to the Companion Card NSW program.

To obtain a Replacement / Change of Details Form telephone the Companion Card NSW Information Line Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au to request that a form be posted to you.

Please note that a new card will not be issued as it does not affect the details on the card.

Renewal of Companion Cards

Companion Cards are printed with an expiry date on the bottom right hand corner. All cardholders will need to renew their card prior to this date. The renewal period is based on –

- The physical life expectancy (wear and tear) of the card;
- The requirement for photographs to remain reflective of the cardholder’s appearance;

To renew your card, you will need to complete a Replacement / Change of Details Form and return it to the Companion Card NSW program. Please note that as with your initial application, you will need to attach two, identical colour, passport photographs. They must be a front view of your head and shoulders and will need to be signed by a relevant service provider or health professional who can verify that the photographs represent you.

Please refer to the section, ‘How Do I Apply’ for further information regarding the required photographs.

You can apply for a renewal card up to 6 months before your existing card is due to expire.

To obtain a Replacement / Change of Details Form telephone the Companion Card NSW Information Line Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au to request that a form be posted to you.

Misuse of Companion Cards

The Companion Card is not a new responsibility; nor is it a benefit or a discount scheme. It simply ensures that a person with disability, who is unable to attend venues and events without a companion to provide attendant care type support, will not be charged two admission fees. Responsible use of your Companion Card will ensure that organisations continue to participate in the program.

You must only use your Companion Card if you are unable to participate at a particular venue or event without attendant care type support. The Companion Card must not be used if your need is for reassurance or social support. If you have previously attended an activity independently, this arrangement should continue, unchanged.

The potential for misuse of the Companion Card has been minimised by implementing a rigorous application and audit process which ensures that the card reaches its intended audience.

The Card itself has been designed with a large number of security features. Participating organisations will be able to use these to verify cardholder information when taking bookings and distributing tickets. Attempted misuse by cardholders may result in card cancellation.

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 support agencies listed in this handbook under ‘Additional Resources’.
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 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, 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 has a requirement for more than one companion, the cardholder must negotiate this with the venue/activity operator at the time of booking.

8. The Companion Card can be used to obtain admission 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 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. 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 that 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.
Getting more information about the Companion Card

The Companion Card NSW web page

www.nswcompanioncard.org.au

This web page provides a range of information about the Companion Card NSW program including answers to frequently asked questions and a listing of Affiliates. Copies of this handbook, the application form, and a range of other Companion Card information can also be downloaded from the web page.

The Companion Card NSW Information Line

The Companion Card NSW Information Officers are available during business hours to respond to queries regarding the Companion Card NSW program and can also assist you with questions regarding the application form.

Copies of this handbook, the application form, and a range of other Companion Card information can be obtained by contacting the Companion Card NSW Information Line. Please telephone Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au

Note: The Companion Card NSW Information Line can only assist you with queries directly relating to the Companion Card.

Information in Other Formats

This handbook can be made available in various formats.

To obtain a copy in the format you require, please telephone the Companion Card NSW Information Line on Free Call 1800 893 044 or email companioncard@nds.org.au

Privacy

The information supplied to the Companion Card NSW program will be recorded and stored in a database and used solely for the purposes of administering the Companion Card program and, where consent is given, for evaluation purposes. The information collected can be accessed via a Freedom of Information Request.

You will not be sent any material that is not directly related to the Companion Card program. The information will not be shared, used or disclosed to anyone who is not involved in the administration, implementation or evaluation of the program.
Additional Resources

For further information regarding other disability services

- **People with Disability website**
  www.pwd.org.au
  People with Disability provides:
  - information services,
  - individual and group advocacy,
  - systemic advocacy and
  - education and training
  
  Telephone: (02) 9370 3100
  Toll Free: 1800 422 015
  TTY: (02) 9318 2138
  TTY Toll Free: 1800 422 016
  Email: pwd@pwd.org.au

- **Ageing, Disability and Home Care website**
  www.adhc.nsw.gov.au
  The NSW Department of Family & Community Services, Ageing, Disability & Home Care funds programs and services that provide people with disability, opportunities to participate in community life.
  
  Telephone: (02) 8270 2000
  TTY: (02) 8270 2167
  Email: service@dhs.nsw.gov.au

- **Yellow Pages**
  See ‘Disability Services and Support Organisations’ in the Yellow Pages.

For further information regarding Disability Discrimination and Your Rights

Disability Discrimination is unlawful under state and federal laws. If you feel that you have been discriminated against, you may be able to get further information and advice from the following resources:

- **Legal Aid NSW** provides a range of services to people who need advice, assistance and representation, and who qualify for legal aid.
  
  Telephone 1300 888 529

- **NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Centre** was set up in 1994 to help people with disability to use disability discrimination laws. Their role is to provide accurate and easy to comprehend advice to people with disability in NSW who want to make a complaint of disability discrimination.
  
  Telephone: 1800 800 708 (NSW only)

- **Australian Human Rights Commission** undertakes a wide range of activities to assist individuals and organisations to understand their rights and meet their legal responsibilities.
  
  Telephone: (02) 9284 9600
  General enquiries and publications:
  1300 369 711
  TTY: 1800 620 241

The information supplied will be handled in accordance with the privacy principles contained in the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.

For more information about privacy, you can refer to:

- **Privacy NSW**
  www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au