

V/Line Staff Accessibility Update

January 2022

Welcoming in 2022

Hi All,

Welcome to the first accessibility newsletter of 2022.

In this update we are excited to introduce articles written by our Accessibility Champions, this is a new segment in which our champions will actively raise awareness and provide information about disability to support our staff with questions they might have.

As always, we hope that you take something away from this newsletter to share with your colleagues, family and friends that maybe you did not know before.

If you would like to contribute to a future update with a customer service story or experience, or if you have any questions about anything included in this update, please send me an email to accessibility@vline.com.au¹

Happy reading,

Cassandra Bertram

Accessibility Officer

Vision impairment

What is vision impairment?

Vision impairment is the loss of partial or full vision from one or both eyes, however no two people's vision loss is the same.

Vision loss can occur in many forms, and in most cases people who experience a vision impairment still have some percentage of vision available to them. Some examples of different conditions that impact vision are:

Age-related macular degeneration – causes distortion or loss of central vision in older people, resulting in difficulties with activities such as reading and recognising faces.

Diabetic retinopathy – symptoms include blurring and patchiness in vision. The underlying cause is diabetes.

Glaucoma – causes tunnel vision and affects safe mobility and driving.

Cataracts – cause blurring of vision and increased sensitivity to glare, but can be corrected by surgery.

Refractive error – half of all vision impairment in Australia is due to under-corrected refractive error which covers long-sightedness, short-sightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia. Refractive errors can be improved by wearing glasses.

Vision loss in children – there are many diseases, defects, malformations, infections and disorders that can affect the visual system in babies and infants.

It is important to note that there is only a small percentage of people who are blind or have low vision that experience total vision loss and we should not assume that customers require assistance just because they are using a cane or a dog.

Should you want to provide assistance to someone who is blind or has low vision, approach the customer and verbally make yourself known as a V/Line employee. Once the customer acknowledges you, you can ask if the customer requires any verbal or sighted guide to their service.

You will find that most customers know their way around the station pretty well as they may have done some occupational therapy and orientation training for their typical day-to-day tasks.

If you would like to learn more about vision impairment and its effects, please visit the [Vision Australia website](#)² or speak with your Accessibility Champions, and please be sure you are looking after your eye sight and are getting your regular check-ups.

International Day of People with Disability

On Friday 3 December 2021, V/Line celebrated International Day of People with Disability across the organisation.

This year guest speaker Martin Stewart shared his story with V/Line staff members. Martin emphasised the important role each of us play as public transport workers in empowering our customers to travel and connecting people with disability to their work, family and community. Staff were also able to have their questions answered by Martin about his experience living with disability, using public transport, and what they could do to provide excellent and accessible customer service.

Additionally, V/Line worked with Yarra Trams and Metro Trains to run a successful cross-operator event with our Accessibility Reference Groups. The Groups shared key achievements of the past year and collaborated on how we can encourage customers to return to the network. We would like to thank all of the attendees across the multiple Reference Groups for their time and dedication to making the Victorian Transport Network a more accessible service.

Meet one of our champions

We would like to introduce you to one of our accessibility champions, Margert Glohe.

Marg is our Accessibility Champion located at Bendigo Station. When asked why Marg wanted to become an Accessibility Champion, Marg stated that she wanted to be a champion to help empower and assist customers with disability where it may not be obvious to the eye.

She believes that this initiative is a great reflection on V/Line and what we stand for, ensuring that we are a kind and considerate workforce, regardless of the circumstances.

Mental health awareness

Hi everyone, Brandon Woodyatt here, your Accessibility Champion on the Western line, I hope you're well, looking after yourself and each other.

Given people are now returning to the network after a hard and overwhelming 18 months, we will see those filled with joy and relief, but also others who are facing life changes such as fear of living with COVID, no job or adapting to life with a disability which they have not experienced before. All these things create stress in our customers' lives and could be impacting their mental health, causing them to behave in an undesirable manner when travelling on V/Line services.

It's important we approach each other with the same friendly demeanor that we give to each and every one of our customers. Recognising that the way we approach people can go a long

way to making the connection with someone who is going through a tough time easier, hence I want to talk on mental health.

Did you know on average one in five people (20 per cent or 4.8 million) are impacted by their mental health. This could be a relative, a co-worker, a friend or even a customer. It's important to recognise a change in someone's behaviour, this could be their attitude or relying on alcohol/drugs etc. What is most important is **anybody** can ask the question RU OK?

By asking the question you will most likely have a great discussion with this person and help them on the road to recovery. A conversation starter could be as simple as, 'Hey Barry, I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately, are you okay?'. By asking this question you are not only making the connection but also prompting the person to understand that someone is here to talk to, willing to listen, not judge and help get some of the weight off their shoulders.

At the same time, the person may say 'I'm fine' and this is okay too, nobody should be, or feel pressured to speak when they are not ready. But it pays to randomly check in at a later date, as they may not have felt comfortable at the time to open up. This also may help change the mindset of what is going on around them.

The reason why I mentioned customers above is these people are the backbone of why we have a job today. Some of the most fantastic regulars we have on our lines do have bad days also. It's important, if we have the opportunity, to be our best and help by lending an ear.

It's a reminder to each and every one of us, we're only human, but we all can play a part in mental health, and whilst you don't need any formal training to ask a question, it does help! So, if you see someone in distress, acting unusual or seeing someone worn down, check in, it could be what turns their day from bad to good, or at least assist them to get the help they need. I know I have mentioned *important* above many times, and that is because mental health is just as important as returning home from work each morning, day or night safely!

For people at risk of harming contact 000 immediately and if around a rail reserve, also call Control (V/Line) or Metrol (Metro Trains).

Other contacts

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Beyond Blue on 1300 22 46 36
- Headspace on 1800 650 890
- QLife on 1800 184 527
- EAP 1800 808 374 – this is available to all V/Line staff and their immediate family and is 100 per cent confidential
- your GP
- V/Line Mental Health Champions who are available to all V/Line staff, [click here](#)³ to find out more.

Assistance Animals

Hey everyone, Liv Brewer here, I've compiled some information around Assistance Animals that fall under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992(DDA), and Public Transport Victoria conditions of travel rules. Hopefully this helps with some questions you may have surrounding Assistance Animals on our services.

Feel free to check out the websites listed below, there is a lot of information out there.

What is the difference between a Service Animal and an Emotional Support Animal (ESA)?

A Service Animal is trained to help people with disabilities such as visual impairments, mental illnesses, seizure, diabetes, and other medical conditions. **Emotional Support Animals** provide their owner's therapeutic benefits through companionship. Both come in a variety of species, canine, feline, guineapig, horse, monkey, the list is endless. Both Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals are types of Assistance Animal.

What can an Assistance Animal do?

These animals can complete tasks like opening and closing doors, turning off the light, or making a noise to indicate that attention is needed in some shape or form. They can also provide physical support with balance and stability, retrieve medication, as well as pull wheelchairs.

Assistance Animals can also assist individuals should they have a seizure by raising the alarm or lying next to them to prevent injury, and even alert susceptible people to the presence of allergens.

The [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)⁴ (DDA) in Section 9, sets out the legal definition of an Assistance Animal as a dog or other animal that:

- (a) is accredited under a State or Territory law to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of disability; or
- (b) is accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed in the regulations; or
- (c) is trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

Remember an Assistance Animal is trained, like a Guide Dog, to help our customers ease or manage the effects of a disability or condition.

Sometimes customers with a legitimate Assistance Animal, may not be aware of the PTV Assistance Animal Pass. Please refer our customers to the PTV website or if you have a spare copy hand them the Assistance Animal Pass form for them to follow up on. You can direct them to the PTV website for the terms and conditions of travel, so they are aware for next time. It is good to also take note of the occurrence and let your supervisor know.

Which animals are eligible for a PTV Animal Assistance Pass?

Currently the animals must fall into one of the following criteria:

- mobility support animals that help people with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs or have difficulty moving around
- medical alert animals that help people before and during a medical emergency
- psychiatric service animals that help people with mental illness.

To receive a pass, customers need to provide evidence that their Assistance Animal is formally trained (a list of trainers is available on the PTV website) to help them manage their disability and meets similar standards of hygiene and obedience as a Guide Dog. Guide Dogs and Hearing Dogs (working or in-training) can already travel free and don't need an Assistance Animal Pass.

Assistance Animals with a pass can travel free on public transport in Victoria. The handler must also have a valid ticket or pass.

If you come across someone who has an Assistance Animal onboard, but does not have the Animal Assistance pass, make a judgement on the behaviour of the animal and if you deem that the animal is not a risk to other patrons and is behaving appropriately do not remove the customer from your service or get into conflict.

If you believe that the customer is not aware of the pass, please provide them with the resources above to ensure they can travel with a valid ticket in future.

This [website⁵](#), enables our front line staff to communicate consistently with customers with disabilities, ensuring they feel informed, respected and safe. Also on our website are the new virtual station tours, our virtual train tours and accessibility maps which allow customers with disabilities to access information essential to planning their journey prior to travel.

Footnotes

1. accessibility@vline.com.au
2. <https://www.visionaustralia.org/>
3. <https://vlineau.sharepoint.com/sites/home/SitePages/Mental-Health-Champions.aspx>
4. http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/dda1992264/
5. <https://www.vline.com.au/Fares-general-info/Accessibility>