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## **Fact Sheet 5**

## **Mobility Devices including the Long White Cane and Dog Guides**

Mobility devices specifically for vision loss include white canes, white walking sticks and dog guides. People with vision loss who have balance problems may use a walking frame or wheelchair.

White Canes

The long white cane is the most commonly used mobility device and most people who use a cane have had training in order to use it safely. It is important not to touch a person’s cane or try to ‘grab and guide’ them when they are walking around.

Motor vehicle drivers should not change their driving habits from the usual road rules when they see a person with a cane, as the person may not be able to see a driver gesturing to them through a wind screen. There is also the risk that drivers who stop at an unexpected point on the road may cause an accident.

Some white cane users will only cross roads when there is no traffic sound to be heard, particularly if they have very low vision or they are totally blind. A nearby idling car may therefore become a safety risk to a white cane user who is wanting to cross a road.

*Some cars are now quieter and this can create additional challenges for people who need to listen for traffic sounds, in order to safely cross roads.*

Dog Guides

Dog guides are trained to assist with safe mobility and have been used in Australia since 1951.

At times, handlers need to use a high level of skill to travel safely with their dog guide such as when crossing roads, using public transport, when in crowded places and when in new environments. These skills are gained through intensive training and practise. Some people have two or three dog guides in their lifetime, as each dog reaches retirement at around age 10, if not before.

**PTO**

The working life of a dog guide is fluid as they gain experience working in the community with their handler and then reach their declining years.

Maree: *“The public are in awe of my dog guide, but I don’t think they realise the amount of training and work put into her”.*

Dog guides can be of great interest to the general public, however, if a dog guide is distracted from its work, this can potentially pose a safety risk to the handler and the dog.

Distracting a dog guide can also cause the handler increased anxiety and to perhaps avoid a venue. This may cause feelings of isolation which is counterproductive to the aims of having a dog guide.

Maree: *“My dog needs to be safe from distractions, to keep me safe”.*

It is important to avoid unnecessarily moving into the personal space of the handler and dog guide. Dog guides may also become distracted through others making eye contact, talking to and touching the dog.

Handlers who are happy for others to interact with their dog, will indicate this is the case, when it is safe for them to do so.

*At all times, the person should be the focus, rather than the dog guide. Handlers ask to be given every opportunity to work their dog guide safely and free from unwanted distractions.*

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