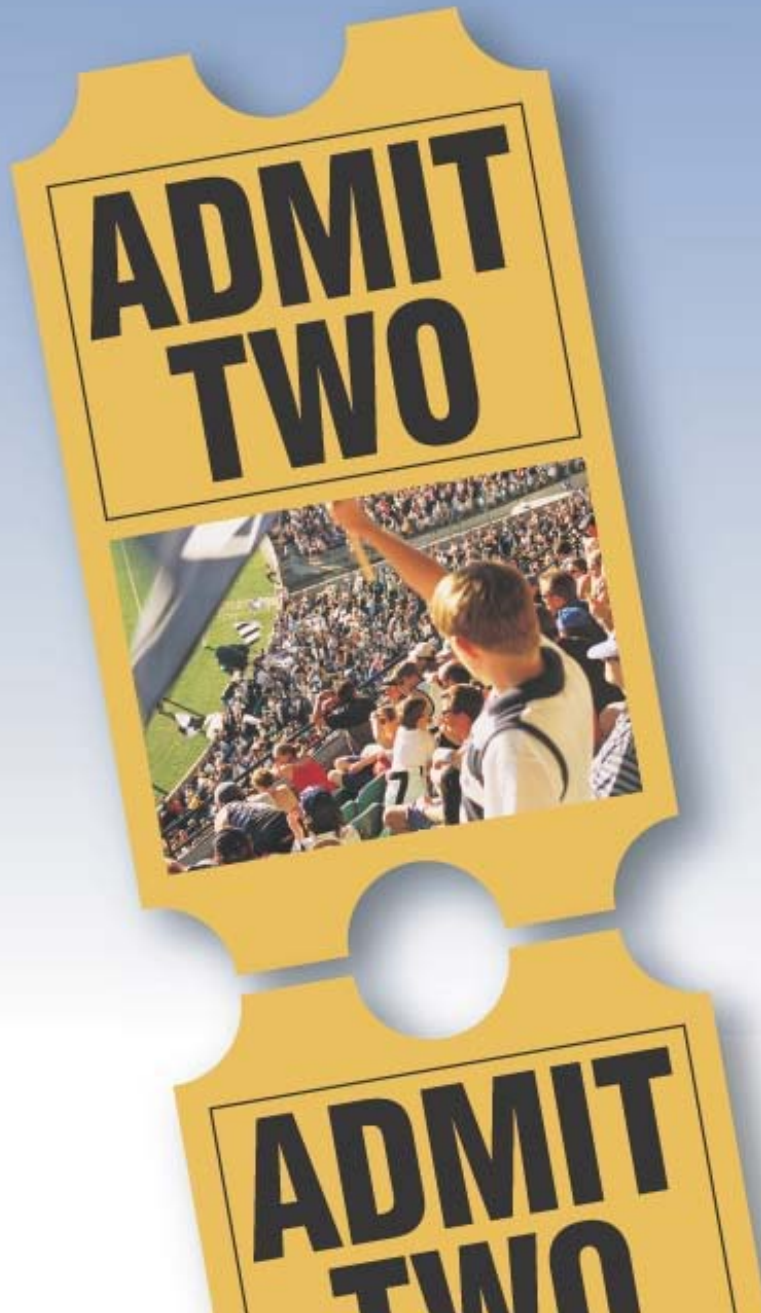




VICTORIA

# Cardholder Handbook



# Cardholder Handbook

**June 2004**

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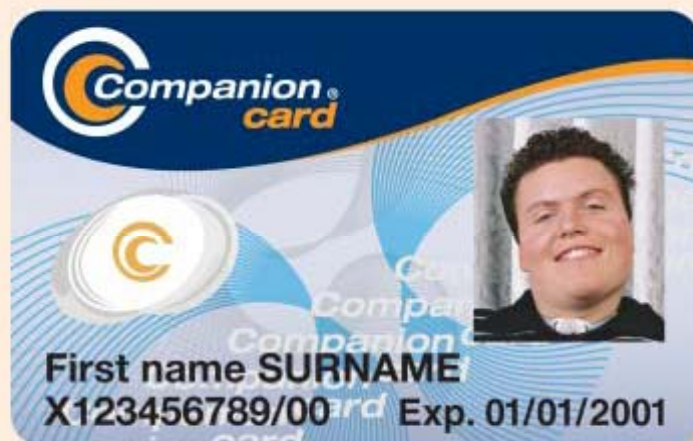
Companion Card® is a registered trade mark of the State of Victoria.

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

[www.companioncard.org.au](http://www.companioncard.org.au)

or telephone the Companion Card Information Line on:

**1800 650 611**



The Department of Human Services 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 program

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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 it lists other resources which may be helpful.

You should read this handbook before you complete the application form, which can be found in the sleeve at the back of this handbook. 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 a disability, which may include issues relating to ageing and psychiatric illness, 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 them to participate in most community activities.

***“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. Victorian-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.

## **Why has the Companion Card been developed?**

The Victorian Network On Recreation and Disability (VICNORD) developed the concept of a Companion Card in response to continued concern from people with a disability, who found the pricing policies of many entertainment, leisure and recreation venues/activities to be discriminatory.

People with a disability, who are unable to attend community venues and activities without attendant care support, have a right to equal participation in the community. This fundamental right is protected under section 42 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic) and Section 8 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cwlth). Both these Acts make it unlawful to discriminate against a person who requires the assistance of a companion.

In the past, a person with a disability who needed attendant care type support from a companion in order to participate at most venues/activities in the community, has sometimes been required to pay two admission and/or booking fees; one for themselves and one for their companion.

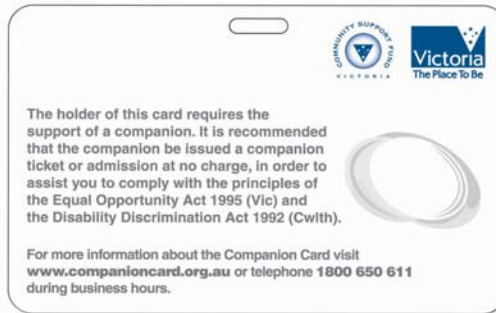
This practice is discriminatory because it has the effect of doubling the admission and/or booking price for the person with a disability.

A number of venue/activity operators have attempted to address this inequity and have allowed free admission for companions. To date, however, these organisations have not had a simple or consistent method of identifying who may legitimately require a companion.

The Companion Card has been developed to promote the existing right of people with a disability to fair ticketing. It is not a discount scheme, concession or benefit; nor is it a new responsibility.

The Companion Card is one easy way to demonstrate the requirement of a companion, and will assist industry to comply with relevant anti-discrimination legislation.

The Companion Card is a not for profit program. Administration of the program is funded by the Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund, Strategic Initiatives Fund.



## Who is the Companion Card for?

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

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 do not enable the person to carry out these tasks independently. It does not include providing only reassurance, social company or encouragement.

The Companion 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.

The Companion Card is not issued to every person who has a disability. The card is issued to people who can demonstrate that they would not be able to participate at most venues and activities without a companion, and that this need is life-long. Companion Cards cannot be issued if the applicant is likely to become independent in the future as a result of treatment/management, training, recovery or developmental improvements. Companion Cards can only be issued when an ongoing need for a companion can be demonstrated.

There are no income or assets tests applied to applications for a Companion Card, and people may apply irrespective of their employment status or nationality.

Companion Card applicants must meet criteria developed by the Victorian Department of Human Services.

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

1. You live in Australia, or you reside in Australia under a valid visa; and
2. You have a significant permanent disability; and
3. Due to the impact of your disability, you would be unable to participate at most community venues or activities without attendant care support; and
4. Your need for a companion will be life-long.

Facilities, organisations or potential companions are not eligible to apply for a Companion Card. Cards will only be issued in the name of, and will remain the property of, the person who has a disability. This enables the cardholder to choose whom they prefer to take as a companion to each venue/activity.

### **How is the Card used?**

The Companion Card can be presented when booking or purchasing a ticket, provided the cardholder requires attendant care 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 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 is likely to jeopardise the willingness of industries to participate in the program, and may result in card cancellation.

## **Who is a companion?**

A companion may be a paid or unpaid person whose attendant care 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 required for only reassurance, social company or encouragement; or if they are present to compensate for a particular venue's lack of accessibility.

## **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. Victorian-based industries, including those with national operations or outlets, are eligible to become affiliates.

The Companion Card program is a Victorian-based initiative and has been developed with an initial focus on Victorian 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. It is expected that over time, the card will become generally accepted by activities and venues that charge admission.

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 you show it to them or tell them about it. The back of your card provides a web site address and telephone number for venue and activity operators to

access more information about the Companion Card and to find out how to affiliate with the program. It is anticipated that by raising awareness in this way, many more organisations and industries will participate in the program and thus recognise the rights of people who require a companion.

### **How much does it cost?**

Administration of the Companion Card is funded by the Victorian State Government through the Community Support Fund, Strategic Initiatives Fund. Cards are issued free of charge.

### **Is my disability and my need for a companion 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 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 able to hold a Companion Card until their ongoing support needs are clear.

### **How do I demonstrate that I qualify for a Companion Card?**

You can demonstrate your need for a Companion Card in one of two ways:

1. You currently receive one of the specific supports or services listed in the Cardholder Application Form. People who receive these supports or services have all previously undergone an assessment that demonstrated their requirement for a Companion Card.

**OR**

2. You can demonstrate that you are unable to participate at most venues and activities without attendant care support with mobility, communication, self-care or learning, and that this need is life-long.

## **How do I apply?**

An application form must be completed and submitted to the Companion Card program. An application form can be found at the back of this handbook. Application forms can also be downloaded from the Companion Card web site, or you can telephone the Companion Card Information Line to request that a form be posted to you.

Do not use a photocopied application form.

You will need to submit two, identical colour, passport photographs (from a passport photo outlet) with your application.

Your photograph will be printed on the Card and will be used by event operators to identify you as the cardholder, therefore the photograph must be clear and current. 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 full front view of your head and shoulders only.

Your photographs cannot 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 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 professional can sign your form. The professional can only sign your application 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 support.

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.

## **What if I do not qualify to receive a Companion Card?**

The Companion Card will only be issued to people who meet all of the 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; or a person who is affected by the specific inaccessibility of a particular venue. 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.

## **Replacement Cards**

You can 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 up-dated.

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

To obtain a Replacement / Change of Details form, visit our web site or telephone the Companion Card Information Line to request a form to be posted to you.

## **Change of address**

If you wish to update your mailing address, you can advise the Companion Card program by completing a Replacement/Change of Details form. A replacement card will not be issued for a change of address, 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. After this period all cardholders will need to renew their card. 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;
- The potential for change in the support requirements for some cardholders.

To renew your card, you will need to complete a new Cardholder Application Form and return it to the Companion Card program.

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

You can download a Cardholder Application Form from our web site or telephone the Companion Card Information Line to request a form to 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 people who are unable to attend venues and events without a companion to provide attendant care support, are not 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 support; not only if you need someone 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 a robust application process that ensures the Companion Card reaches its intended target group.

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.

## **Complaints / Grievances**

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”.

If you have a grievance regarding the outcome of your Companion Card application, you can request a review of your application. Telephone the Companion Card Information Line for details on how to do this.

## **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 a Companion Ticket 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 web site**

[www.companioncard.org.au](http://www.companioncard.org.au)

This web site provides a range of information about the Companion Card program, translations of key information, answers to frequently asked questions, and links to other useful web sites.

Copies of this handbook, the application form, and a range of other Companion Card forms can also be downloaded from the web site.

### **Recorded Information Lines**

Recorded information is available 24 hours per day. The Recorded Information Lines provide a summary of the program and answers to frequently asked questions in various languages.

- For recorded information in English telephone **1300 305 620**.
- For recorded information in languages other than English, telephone the relevant Multilingual Information Line. (See details over page or on the inside front cover of this handbook.)

### **The Companion Card Information Line**

The Companion Card Information Line staff are available during business hours to respond to queries regarding the Companion Card 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 forms can be obtained by contacting the Companion Card Information Line.

Telephone **1800 650 611** (English speaking)

If you do not speak English, you can connect to the Companion Card Information Line with the assistance of an interpreter by telephoning the relevant Multilingual Information Line. (See details on the next page.)

If you are Deaf, have a hearing impairment, or have complex communication needs, and you would like to access the Companion Card Information Line, please telephone:

- ☛ The Companion Card TTY on **1800 898 888**, or
- ☛ The National Relay Service on **13 36 77**, or
- ☛ The Speech-to-Speech Relay Service on **1300 555 727**

Ask to be connected to the Companion Card Information Line on **1800 650 611**.

### **Information in Other Formats**

This handbook can be made available in various formats.

To obtain a copy in the format you require, visit the Companion Card web site or telephone the Companion Card Information Line.

### **Information in Other Languages**

This handbook can be made available in various languages.

To obtain a copy in the language that you require, visit the Companion Card web site, or telephone the Companion Card Information Line directly or via the relevant Multilingual Information Line.

The Multilingual Information Lines provide recorded information regarding the Companion Card 24 hours per day. They can also connect callers to interpreters to speak with the Companion Card Information Line during business hours.

### **Multilingual Information Line Telephone Numbers**

Amharic	1300 305 601
Arabic	1300 305 602
Cantonese	1300 305 603
Croatian	1300 305 604
Greek	1300 305 607
Italian	1300 305 608
Macedonian	1300 305 609
Mandarin	1300 305 610
Polish	1300 305 612
Russian	1300 305 613
Serbian	1300 305 614
Somali	1300 305 615
Spanish	1300 305 616
Turkish	1300 305 617
Vietnamese	1300 305 618
Other Languages	1300 305 619

### **Additional Resources**

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

**For further information regarding other disability services**

#### **➤ The Disability Online web site**

**[www.disability.vic.gov.au](http://www.disability.vic.gov.au)**

**Disability Online provides comprehensive information including:**

- **A Victorian directory of disability-related services,**
- **An activities calendar,**
- **The latest disability-related news,**
- **Disability and health related articles**
- **A portal into other useful disability-related web sites to use as a resource for further high-quality information.**

➤ **Yellow Pages**

See 'Disability Services and Support Organisations' in the Yellow Pages.

➤ **Department of Human Services Intake and Response Team**

provides information about community supports and services for people with a disability, their families and carers in your local area. Telephone 1800 783 783.

## 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:

**Victorian Legal Aid** provides free legal advice and can represent you in court if you are eligible for legal aid.

- Telephone (03) 9269 0234 (metro) or 1800 677 402 (country callers)

**Local community legal centres** provide free legal advice and assistance. Contact the Federation of Community Legal Centres to get details of the community legal centre nearest to you:

- Telephone (03) 9602 4949

**Disability Discrimination Legal Service** is a community legal service specialising in disability discrimination law and offers free information, advice and assistance.

- Telephone (03) 9602 4877 (voice) or (03) 9602 4135 (TTY) or Email: [info@ddls.org.au](mailto:info@ddls.org.au)

**Villamanta Legal Service** is a community legal service that offers free information and advice, specialising in disability-related legal issues.

- Telephone 1800 014 111 (free call in Victoria)

### **Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria (EOCV)**

EOCV provides information about equal opportunity rights and responsibilities through its Advice Line and helps people resolve complaints of unlawful discrimination or harassment through its conciliation service. These services are impartial, confidential and free.

- ➔ Telephone: (03) 9281 7111  
Toll free: 1800 134 142  
TTY: (03) 9281 7110  
Facsimile: (03) 9281 7171  
Web site: [www.eoc.vic.gov.au](http://www.eoc.vic.gov.au)  
E-mail: [eoc@vicnet.net.au](mailto:eoc@vicnet.net.au)

### **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission**

Human rights education is one of the core responsibilities of the Commission along with the investigation and attempted resolution of complaints about breaches of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation.

- ➔ Telephone: (02) 9284 9600  
Web site: [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)  
General enquiries and publications: 1300 369 711  
TTY: 1800 620 241 Facsimile: (02) 9284 9611  
Complaints Infoline: 1300 656 419 or  
[complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au)

## Privacy

The information supplied to the Companion Card 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.

The information supplied will be handled in accordance with the privacy principles contained in the Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic), and the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic).

For more information about privacy, you can refer to:

- The Health Services Commissioner  
[www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc/)
- The Privacy Commissioner for Victoria  
[www.privacy.vic.gov.au](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au)

**Please do not use a photocopied application form.  
You can download the application form from the  
Companion Card web site:**

**[www.companioncard.org.au](http://www.companioncard.org.au)**

**Or: telephone the Companion Card Information Line  
and request additional forms to be posted to you:**

**Telephone: 1800 650 611**

**TTY: 1800 898 888**

**National Relay Service: 13 36 77**

**Speech to Speech Relay Service: 1300 555 727**



[www.companioncard.org.au](http://www.companioncard.org.au)