

Muskoka Bible Centre –Animal Policy

1. Purpose

Muskoka Bible Centre (MBC) is committed to providing a welcoming environment that respects the dignity and independence of all individuals. This policy outlines MBC's approach to service animals in compliance with the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** and the **Ontario Human Rights Code**.

2. Definitions

- **Service Animal:** An animal trained to assist a person with a disability by performing specific tasks or functions.
- **Handler:** The individual with a disability who is accompanied by and responsible for the service animal.
- **Regulated Health Professional:** A professional recognized under Ontario's *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (e.g., physician, nurse, psychologist, optometrist, etc.).
- **Emotional Support Animal (ESA):** An animal that provides comfort or companionship but is not trained to perform disability-related tasks. ESAs are **not recognized as service animals** under the AODA.

3. General Pet Policy

- Pets and emotional support animals (ESAs) are **not permitted** on Conference Centre grounds, in the MBC Campground, or at Camp Widjiitiwin.
- **Exceptions:** Small caged pets (e.g., hamsters, birds) and indoor cats are permitted only in seasonal trailers, and MBC Acres Cottages.
- **MBC Acres Cottages:** Pets and ESAs are permitted but must not be walked in pet-restricted areas, including the MBC beach.

4. Service Animals

- Service animals are **welcome in all public areas of MBC**, except where prohibited by law or health and safety regulations (e.g., commercial kitchens, mechanical rooms, or certain wildlife-protected zones).
- Service animals are **not pets**; they are trained to perform specific tasks that assist a person with a disability, such as:

- Guiding individuals who are blind or visually impaired
- Alerting to sounds or low blood sugar
- Assisting during seizures
- Providing calming support for autism
- Retrieving dropped objects
- Offering mobility support

5. Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)

- ESAs provide emotional comfort but are not trained to perform disability-related tasks.
- Under the AODA, ESAs **do not qualify as service animals**, and MBC is not required to accommodate them in areas designated for service animals.
- This policy aligns with current accessibility legislation.

6. Documentation and Verification

Under the AODA, an animal qualifies as a service animal if:

1. It is **visibly apparent** that the person requires the animal for reasons related to a disability; or
2. The person provides the **required documentation** from a **regulated health professional** confirming that they require the service animal for reasons related to their disability.

MBC requests that the Dog Registration Form be completed annually. This form can be found at <https://www.muskokabible.com/about/information-and-policies/service-animal-policy/>

Certificates or vests from unregulated online sources are **not sufficient** proof of service animal status.

MBC reserves the right to **evaluate and verify** documentation to ensure compliance with AODA standards.

7. Registration and Advance Notification

To support accessibility planning and staff readiness:

- Handlers are asked to complete the **MBC Service Animal Registration Form** and provide supporting documentation **at least two (2) weeks prior to arrival**.

- A tag for the service animal will be issued at check-in to help staff identify verified service animals and avoid confusion for guests.

8. Health and Safety Standards

To ensure the safety and comfort of all guests:

- Service animals must be in **good health**, free from fleas, ticks, and other parasites.
- Animals must have **current vaccinations** as required by Ontario law (e.g., rabies).
- MBC may request **proof of vaccination** during registration or check-in.

9. Responsibilities of Service Animal Handlers

Handlers must:

1. Supervise and care for their service animal at all times, including feeding, toileting, and cleanup.
2. Ensure the animal is well-trained and socialized for public settings and behaves appropriately around people, other animals, and distractions.
3. Keep the animal **on a leash no longer than 6 feet** when outside their accommodation.
4. Ensure the service animal is **walked only by the handler** it is assigned to.
5. Immediately clean up and properly dispose of animal waste in outdoor areas.

10. Behavioural Expectations

MBC expects service animals to behave in a manner consistent with their training. Behavioural issues that may lead to corrective action include:

- Aggressive behaviour toward people or other animals
- Uncontrolled barking, whining, or growling
- Unsanitary behaviour (e.g., urinating indoors, climbing on furniture outside assigned accommodations)

If inappropriate behaviour occurs:

1. The handler will be given an opportunity to correct the behaviour.
2. Repeated or serious incidents may result in the service animal being **removed from the property**.
3. The handler may continue their stay **without the animal** if appropriate.

4. MBC will **document all incidents** to ensure fairness and consistency.

11. Non-Interference

For the safety and focus of both handler and animal:

- Guests and staff should **not pet, feed, or distract** a service animal without the handler's permission.
- MBC staff may politely remind guests of this rule when necessary.

12. Enforcement and Review

MBC reserves the right to:

- Request verification in accordance with the AODA;
- Refuse or remove any animal that fails to meet the standards in this policy;
- Review and update this policy periodically to reflect current legal and operational best practices.

Approved by: Muskoka Bible Centre Management

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