

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## Assistance Dogs are Effective and Beneficial in Supporting people with FND safely manage daily life: A study and review of the evidence.

**Authors:** Dr Katherine Gill<sup>1</sup>; Emily Heng<sup>2</sup>, Juanita (Tze Juin) Chee<sup>2</sup>

1. FND Australia Support Services, FND Clinic
2. The University of Sydney, M.O.T Placement

**Cite As:** Gill, K., Heng, E., Chee, J. (2025) Assistance Dogs are Effective and Beneficial in Supporting people with FND safely manage daily life: A study and review of the evidence. FND Australia Support Services

☎ 0412 363 287 📠 02 8072 6278



✉ info@fndaus.org.au 🌐 www.fndaus.org.au



FND Australia  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## Contact Information:

Dr. Katherine Gill  
B.Tech.(Bio.), B.Sc. (Hons, H1), M.O.T., PhD.  
Senior Occupational Therapist and Director - FND Clinic  
President and Founder – FND Australia Support Services  
E: kate@fndaus.org.au

## Notes:

Neither FND Australia Support Services nor the FND Clinic are affiliated with any Assistance Dog organisations. Throughout the study participants referenced particular Assistance Dog organisations. Photos of working Assistance Dogs in the report visualise the coat and representative organisation the individual was working with. This does not imply any affiliation or organisation preference. We encourage anyone looking into assistance dogs to do their own research into the effectiveness and cost of particular organisations who provide and / or accredit assistance dogs for people with FND and/or comorbid conditions.

## ABBREVIATIONS USED:

|      |                                      |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| AD   | Assistance Dog                       |
| SW   | Support Worker                       |
| NDIS | National Disability Insurance Scheme |

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## Executive Summary

### Assistance Dogs, FND & NDIS Support

A consultation conducted by The FND Clinic and FND Australia Support Services in October 2025 examined the role of assistance dogs (ADs) in supporting people with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND). The findings were intended to inform the NDIS Evidence Advisory Committee Consultation, which is similarly examining the role of assistance dogs in supporting NDIS participants. Participants were recruited through FND Australia Support Services, a national charity supporting individuals FND.

### Findings:

Participants reported that ADs provide life-saving and life-changing benefits, enhancing safety, independence, symptom management, and daily functioning.

### Key Benefits:

- **Early Warning & Symptom Prevention:** ADs detect subtle physiological or neurological changes and alert the handler, preventing injuries and severe episodes.
- **Support During Episodes:** They provide grounding, deep pressure therapy, sensory input, and alert carers, reducing overstimulation, shock, and hospital interventions.
- **Mobility & Safety:** ADs assist with balance, gait, falls prevention, and navigating public spaces, while supporting daily living tasks.
- **Emotional Regulation & Wellbeing:** Constant co-regulation reduces stress, PTSD triggers, meltdowns, isolation, and anxiety without requiring explanation of disability.
- **Independence & Participation:** ADs enable safe community access, employment, study, and meaningful social engagement.
- **Reduced Caregiver Burden:** 24/7 monitoring alleviates stress on family and informal supports.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## Unique and Irreplaceable Role:

ADs provide continuous, anticipatory, and relational support beyond the capacity of humans, technology, or pets. They enhance therapy effectiveness, prevent hospital admissions, and reduce reliance on formal care.

## Barriers Identified:

Participants reported public interference, stigma, safety risks from uncontrolled dogs, accessibility issues in transport, accommodation, and hospitals, financial strain, and difficulties securing NDIS recognition.

## Alignment with NDIS s34 – Reasonable & Necessary:

- Supports participant goals (34(1)(a)) and social/economic participation (34(1)(b))
- Provides value for money and reduces other support needs (34(1)(c))
- Effective and evidence-based (34(1)(d))
- Cannot be replicated by informal care (34(1)(e)) and is best funded through the NDIS (34(1)(f))
- Operates safely, meeting Public Access Test standards (s34(2))

## Conclusion:

Assistance Dogs deliver specialised, essential support for individuals with FND, enabling independence, safety, and wellbeing. They perform unique tasks not achievable by humans or technology, making them a reasonable and necessary support under the NDIS.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary.....  | 3  |
| 1. Introduction to FND.....   | 7  |
| 2. Evidence-based Research - Assistance Dogs.....   | 11 |
| 2.1 Reducing seizure frequency and seizure detection: .....   | 11 |
| 2.2 PTSD and Assistance Dogs .....  | 12 |
| 3 Methodology.....  | 14 |
| 4 RESULTS: .....  | 14 |
| How Assistance Dogs supports people with FND .....  | 14 |
| 4.1 How do Assistance Dogs help people with FND manage their symptoms?.....   | 15 |
| 4.2 What outcomes do Assistance Dogs help people with FND achieve? .....  | 23 |
| 4.3 Can other disability supports (e.g. assistive technology, standard seizure care,<br>therapeutic supports etc.) help people with FND achieve the outcomes in the same way an<br>assistance dog does? ..... | 31 |
| 4.4. Assistance Dog Training, Management and Finances.....  | 39 |
| 4.5. Challenges faced using Assistance Dogs outdoors.....   | 43 |
| 5. NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME ACT 2013 - SECT 34 - NDIS Reasonable and<br>Necessary Criteria – FND and Assistance Dogs .....  | 48 |
| 6. Summary .....  | 52 |
| 7. References.....  | 56 |
| 8. Appendix.....  | 58 |

## 1. Introduction to FND

Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) is a brain disorder, at the interface of neurology and psychiatry (Keynejad et al., 2019). FND is characterised by altered communication networks within the brain and abnormal communication between the brain and body (Aybek & Perez, 2022) leading to neurological symptoms involving motor, sensory and cognitive impairments.

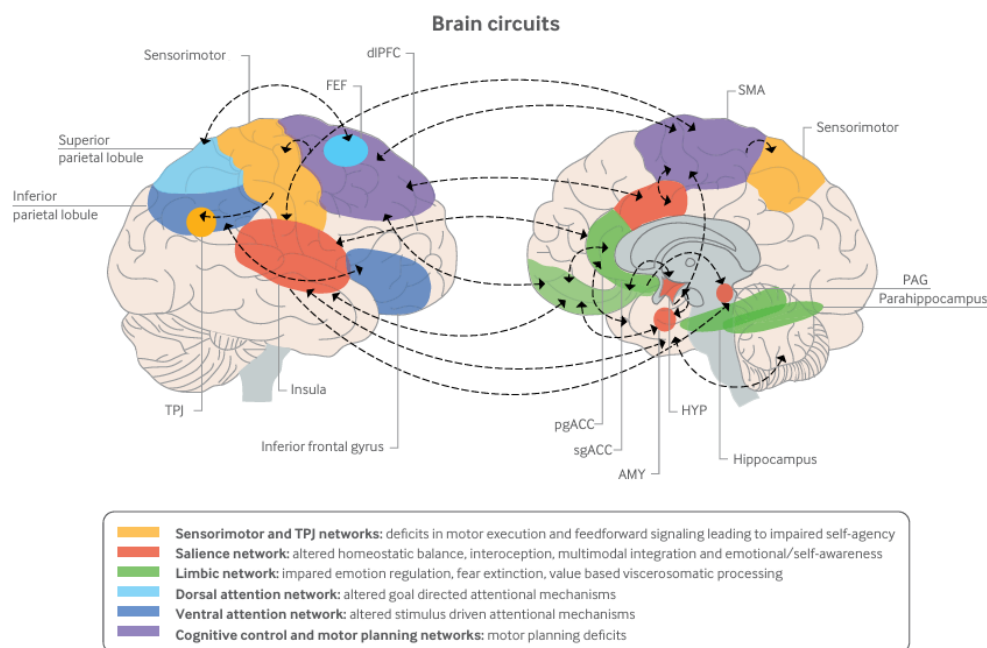


Fig 1 | Emerging pathophysiology of functional neurological disorder In the top panel, core constructs implicated in FND are highlighted, including disturbances in attention, self-agency, prediction/inference, and emotion/threat processing. In the bottom panel, the brain circuits implicated in the pathophysiology of FND (and their interactions) are displayed. As depicted, FND is a multi-network disorder involving abnormalities within and across brain circuits implicated in sense of agency, emotion/threat processing, attention, homeostatic balance, interoception, multimodal integration, and cognitive/motor control, among other functions. Circuits are described by their related dysfunction in the pathophysiology of FND. Several areas cut across multiple networks; for example, the dorsal anterior insula is most strongly interconnected with the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, while the posterior insula receives afferent projections from the lamina I spinothalamic pathway and somatosensory cortices. Similarly, the amygdala is part of both the salience and limbic networks. Prefrontal brain regions are interconnected with striatal-thalamic areas (not shown), and these pathways should also be factored into the neural circuitry of FND. AMY=amygdala; dIPFC=dorsolateral prefrontal cortex; FEF=frontal eye fields; HYP=hypothalamus; PAG=periaqueductal gray; pgACC=perigenual anterior cingulate cortex; sgACC=subgenual anterior cingulate cortex; SMA=supplementary motor area; TPJ=temporoparietal junction. Figures reproduced with permission from Drane et al 2020 *CNS Spectrums*

Aybek, S., & Perez, D. L. (2022). *Diagnosis and management of functional neurological disorder. Bmj*, vol. 376.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

Although people with FND may have an intact macroscopic brain structure, disruptions to signal transmission causes genuine changes to movement, sensation, cognitive, psychosocial and bodily processes.

Recent advances using task and resting-state functional neuroimaging have served to delineate the emerging neurobiology of FND. Neuroimaging studies show that FND involves disruptions across multiple brain networks—including limbic, salience, self-agency, integration, attentional, and sensorimotor circuits—supporting its basis as a complex neurobiological disorder rather than a purely psychological one (Mavroudis et al., 2024).

Major themes across functional neuroimaging studies include:

- (1) heightened amygdala reactivity
- (2) increased limbic/paralimbic-sensorimotor connectivity
- (3) right temporoparietal junction/inferior parietal lobule hypoactivation and altered connectivity with sensorimotor cortices
- (4) attentional dysregulation
- (5) deficits in motor planning, intention, execution or inhibition

Other abnormalities include implicit attentional biases, perceptual-cognitive inferences (Edwards et al., 2012)

Functional Neurological Disorder can lead to profound neurological disability in a large percentage of those affected by the condition (Carson et al., 2011). People with FND experience motor, cognitive and sensory symptoms. Many people's lives are affected daily by seizures. People may also experience motor symptoms from gait disorder to being bed or wheelchair bound. They may also experience tremors, speech and swallowing disorders, continence problems, and sensory disturbances.

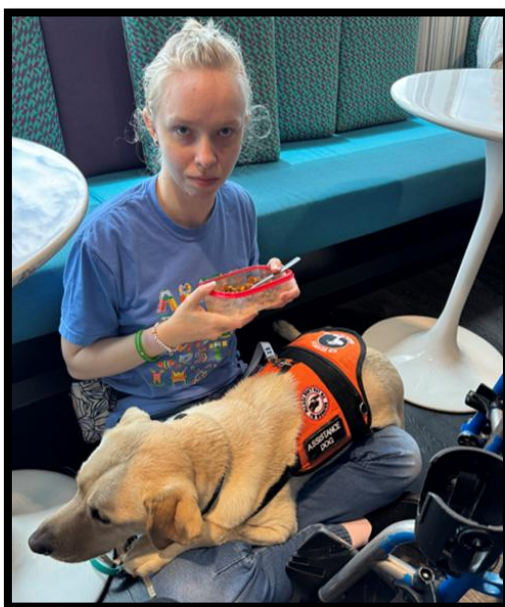
# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

Criterion D of the DSM-5 requires that “*the symptom or deficit causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning or warrants medical evaluation.*” The symptoms associated with FND have a significant impact on daily activities. Across both motor and seizure type FND, health related quality of life (HRQoL) is comparable with, if not worse than, that observed in other major neurological disorders (Aybek & Perez, 2022).

**Assistance dogs help to address the brain network abnormalities in handlers with FND, by supporting emotional regulation, providing grounding, proprioceptive input, addressing attentional dysregulation, supporting motor control and alerting to seizures and supporting recovery from seizures and FND flares.**

Environmental factors influence FND pathophysiology. Social support networks and stigma experiences affect the outcomes in FND (Mavroudis et al., 2024). For many with FND, assistance dogs assist people manage the social and sensory environment.

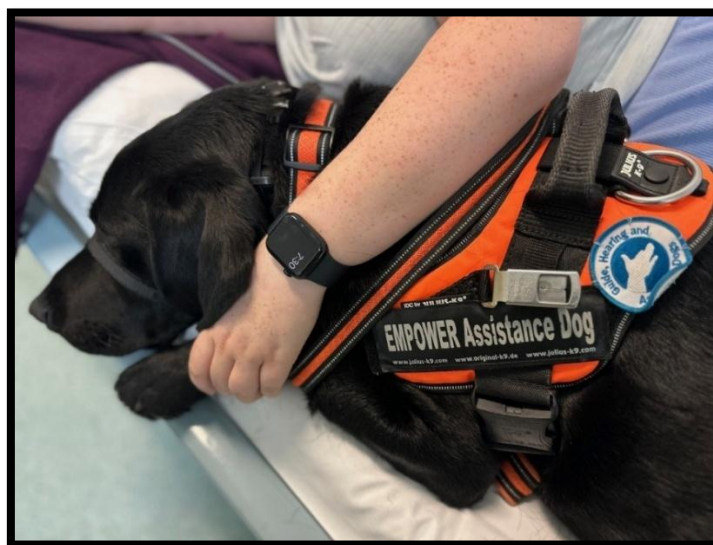


# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

The aetiology of FND is multifaceted, involving various biological, psychological, and social factors. FND involves multiple neurobiological and psychological factors. Neurobiological findings include altered neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin, GABA), evidence of inflammation and microglial activation, and abnormalities in neuroplasticity affecting neural adaptation (Mavroudis et al., 2024). Psychologically, stressful life events, interpersonal conflict, and adverse childhood experiences are key contributing factors to FND development and maintenance. Psychological factors contribute to the pathophysiology of FND (Mavroudis et al., 2024), the prognosis and severity of symptoms.

FND has a high comorbidity with autism (Cole, Elmalem, & Petrochilos, 2023; González-Herrero, Morgante, Pagonabarraga, Stanton, & Edwards, 2022) and psychiatric illness, in particular PTSD (Diez et al., 2021; Ducroizet et al., 2023). Appropriate management of co-morbid conditions affect FND symptoms and outcomes in people with FND (Gelauff & Stone, 2016). Many people with FND who have assistance dogs also have autism and PTSD and the ADs are trained to alleviate and manage the intersecting disabling functional impairments of all the conditions.



## 2. Evidence-based Research - Assistance Dogs

Assistance dogs have been found to detect, respond to physiological and emotional changes in humans which supports their capacity to effectively provide functional support for individuals living with disability.

### 2.1 Reducing seizure frequency and seizure detection:

Research has found that seizure alert dogs (SAD) have decreased seizure frequency (Strong et al. as cited in (Luff, Belluomo, Lugarà, & Walker, 2024). In one study, a group of epileptic patients with tonic-clonic seizures underwent 12 weeks of baseline seizure monitoring (without an SAD), then 12 additional weeks of training with an SAD. When monitored for an additional 24 weeks after the completion of SAD training, seizure patients experienced a 43% reduction in seizure frequency.

Trained dogs also have the ability to detect 'seizure scent' consisting **volatile organic compounds** (VOCs) within  $\pm 90$  minutes of seizure onset. Seizure ADs have been found to **predict seizure** 10 – 45 minutes in advance of onset (Strong et al. as cited in (Luff et al., 2024). Extending this reasoning and given that VOCs are also released through skin in response to **psychological stress** (Lucchi et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2016). It is plausible that trained dogs may also detect stress-induced physiological responses in humans.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



## 2.2 PTSD and Assistance Dogs

A high percentage of people with FND have a diagnosis of PTSD. Assistance dogs for people with FND also support their emotional wellbeing and mood, similar to PTSD assistance dogs which have been shown to have a positive impact on mood (Woodward et al., 2021). Assistance dogs are trained to provide a calming effect and offset hypervigilance in individuals with PTSD (Rodriguez et al. as cited in (Woodward et al., 2024).

**An AD is trained to detect changes in the physiological processes** associated with an acute psychological stress response. Research shows that the stress response involves changes in the volatile organic compounds [VOC] emanating from breath and/or sweat that are detectable to dogs (Wilson, Campbell, Petzel, & Reeve, 2022), along with changes in heart rate and blood pressure.

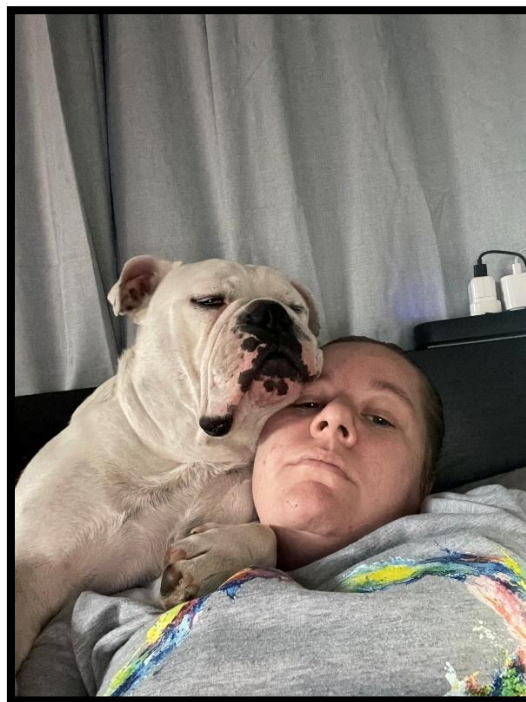
The principal physiological process associated with anxiety, panic attacks, and PTSD is the stress response. **In humans, stress is associated with several physiological changes**, including

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

epinephrine and cortisol release into the bloodstream, in addition to increased heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration, with suppression of digestion (Wilson et al., 2022).

**A trained AD detects changes in its handler, before the handler is even aware they are having a physiological stress response (Wilson et al., 2022). Research has demonstrated that trained dogs were able to discriminate, with a high degree of accuracy, between human breath and sweat samples taken at baseline and when experiencing psychological stress. These results suggest that there is a VOC profile associated with acute psychological stress that is detectable by trained dogs (Wilson et al., 2022).**



Due to their training, assistance dogs are associated with **improved quality of life and increased independence** (Jackson, 2023).

☎ 0412 363 287 ☎ 02 8072 6278



✉ info@fndaus.org.au 🌐 www.fndaus.org.au



FND Australia  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## 3 Methodology

The FND Clinic conducted a two-hour focus group on 28 Oct 2025 to explore topics as guided by document - 'Full set of questions'. This included questions on tasks and outcomes supported by ADs, how ADs support NDIS participants in reaching their NDIS goals, and barriers/challenges related to having an AD.

The focus group was run by a senior occupational therapist with experience in assistance dogs, and two junior occupational therapy students on placement from the University of Sydney. Six attendees participated in the focus group.

A survey was also developed and shared with people with FND, capturing questions guided by the document 'Full set of questions', available at [NDIS Evidence Advisory Committee Consultation September 2025 - Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing - Citizen Space](#). The full set of questions is provided in the appendix. 16 people participated in the survey.

Thematic analysis of survey and focus group outcomes are documented below.

## 4 RESULTS:

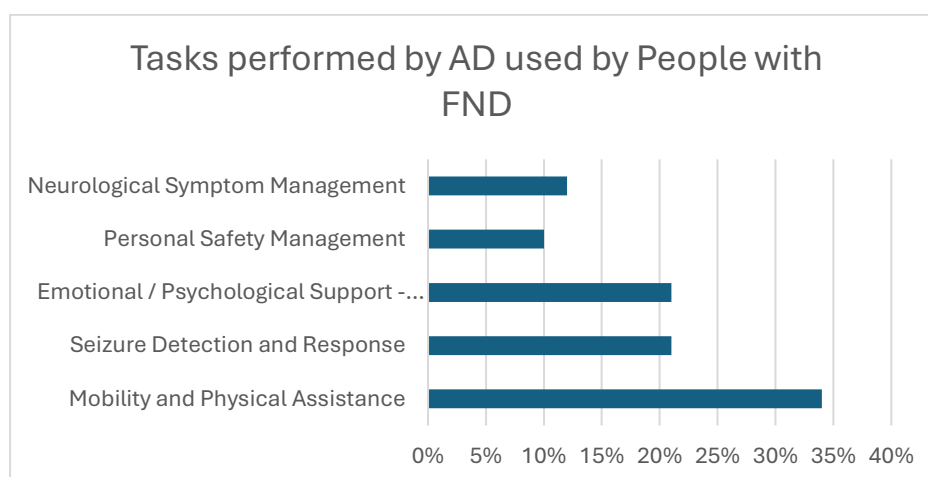
### How Assistance Dogs supports people with FND

*"My AD re-directs me to sit in a safe place when my heart rate increases above 100bpm. She applies DPT [Deep Pressure Therapy] to ground me and reduce my HR. She nudges me .. before I dissociate or have an absent seizure. If I do slip into an absent seizure, she will give one soft-tone bark to rouse me to consciousness. She blocks other people from approaching me too closely by standing or laying down in the gap between me and*

others. She places her body weight against my legs in a lean **to help me steady when I stand**. She finds the exit if when my symptoms worsen in public.”

## 4.1 How do Assistance Dogs help people with FND manage their symptoms?

- **Alert the person** of risk of an oncoming seizure so that the seizure may be potentially prevented or risk of injury is minimised.
  - Example 1: One participant reported that her AD would alert her of an oncoming seizure by making a specific noise, which was a signal for her to lay on the grass to ground herself.
  - Example 2: Another participant’s AD would lick her hand when she gets nervous. This calms her down and reduces the onset of seizures from emotional triggers.



“He will ground me, and **pre warn me when I am going to have a seizure**- ...he will jump on my knee and lay there while I’m having the seizure he will lick my hand and or

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*face sit with me until i have come back around out of the seizure [AD name] is my emotional comfort. I am house bound due to no NDIS funding and unable to drive; he is my only companion during the day. He is the only one that will be there when I can't walk or talk, sleep, or in pain."*

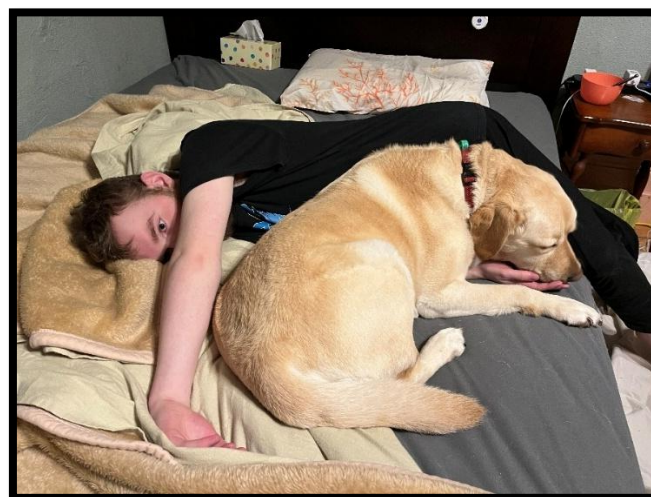
*"My assistance dog is able to **detect seizures well before I can**. He ensures that I am in a **safe environment and also alert my husband** if I am unable to communicate properly. If I am anxious, they know to provide firm and heavy pressure until I calm down and ensure I am **safe and protected** during these episodes."*

*Assistance Dog alerting handler prior to the onset of a seizure, enabling handler to relocate to a safe place to avoid injury.*



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



*AD 'kissing' (licking) his handler's hand to help his brain regain consciousness following a collapse on his bed with a FND absent seizure, after exhausting himself doing his autistic stimming*

☎ 0412 363 287 📠 02 8072 6278



✉ info@fndaus.org.au 🌐 www.fndaus.org.au



FND Australia  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

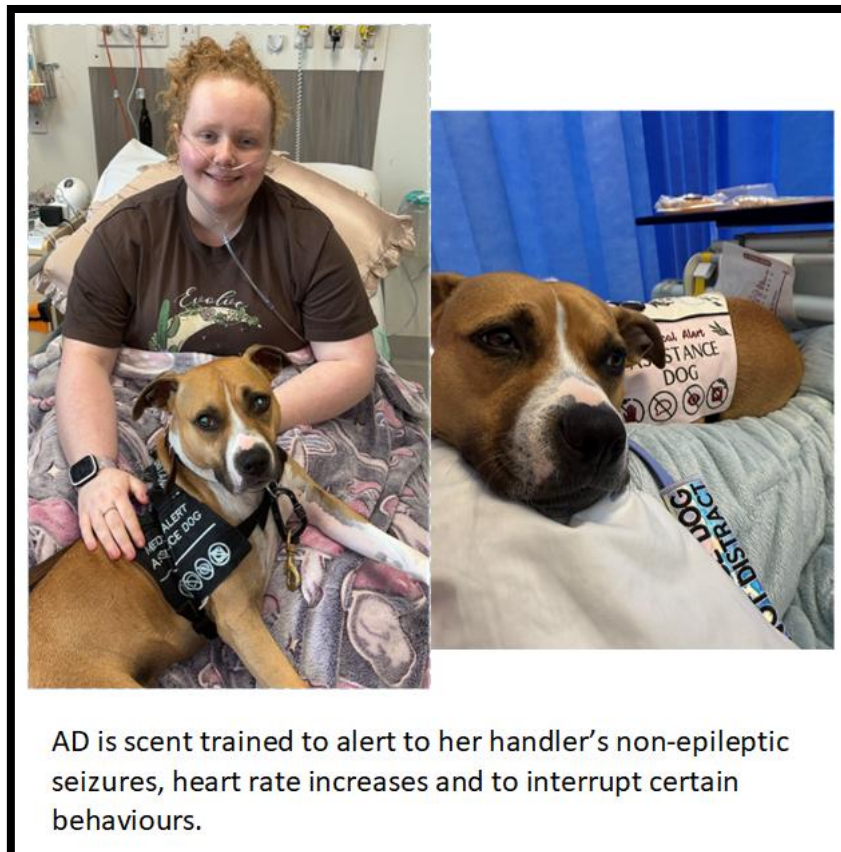
- Assistance Dogs provides emotional support during seizures or other attacks by providing sensory stimuli (e.g. deep pressure therapy)
  - Example 1: A participant noted that holding onto her AD helps her recover from her episodes more quickly.
  - Example 2: Another participant reported that her AD would push its paws down on her shoulders to arouse her from nightmares / dissociative episodes and reducing the onset of FND episodes.

*“My AD helps me **mitigate symptoms by pre warning** me with a lick or fully stopping in front of me to make me notice. My AD will lick my face if I am unconscious or paralysed. This behaviour becomes very persistent, and the licking brings blood back to my face and I come back to consciousness. If I go into a seizure, AD uses pressure to hold me still and calm my central nervous system. They then provide help and **support to get me off the ground.**”*

*“Bracing for support: my FND and the non epileptic seizures and dissociative episodes mean I can have falls and paralysis, so my dog can stand still & bear my weight to **help me up, then help me walk while I hold the harness to get to a safe place to rest.** My dog has been trained to ‘lap’ put his head in my lap to calm me during & after a seizure and temporary paralysis. My dog can do a full body ‘over’ where he lies on me so that the **deep pressure** runs through my body and brain and can **reduce stress, shock, over stimulation, etc which then reduces chance of a seizure from my triggers.** Or do this afterwards in combination with kisses and/ or lap depending on the place and position to help me **regain consciousness after a seizure and then back to full nervous system equilibrium.**”*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



AD is scent trained to alert to her handler's non-epileptic seizures, heart rate increases and to interrupt certain behaviours.

- **Safety:**
  - Preventing strangers from getting too close to the person during seizure outdoors by 'blocking' (i.e. AD positions itself between the person and its environment).
  - Guiding the person through crowded places by clearing a path, therefore reducing stress, which can be a trigger of FND symptoms
  - Guiding the person to rest in quieter areas when the AD detects that the person is overstimulated
  - Signalling to the person if they are not well enough to leave the house (e.g. blocking access to the car)
  - Alerting carers and fetching carers when handler in having a seizure

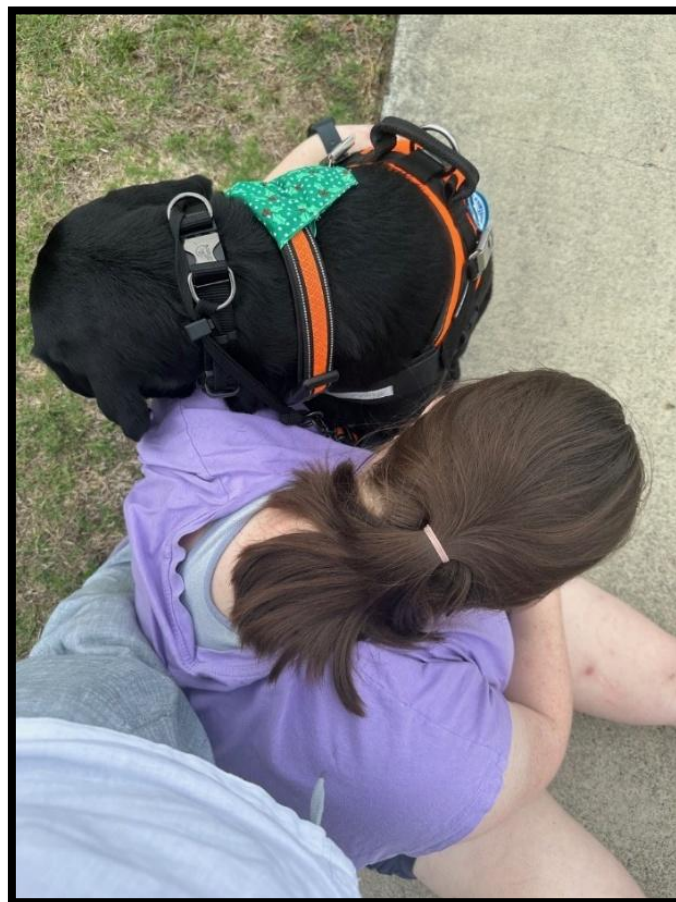
# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*“My assistance dog has been trained to detect seizures and ensure that I am in a safe environment prior to a seizure taking hold.”*

*“Alerts me when I’m about to fall. Breaks my fall. Helps me get up off the ground.”*

- **Providing physical support**



- Helping the person regain balance during episodes of dizziness (e.g., providing counterbalance support), helping to prop the person up after a fall.

☎ 0412 363 287 📠 02 8072 6278



✉ info@fndaus.org.au 🌐 www.fndaus.org.au



**FND Australia**  
Support Services Inc

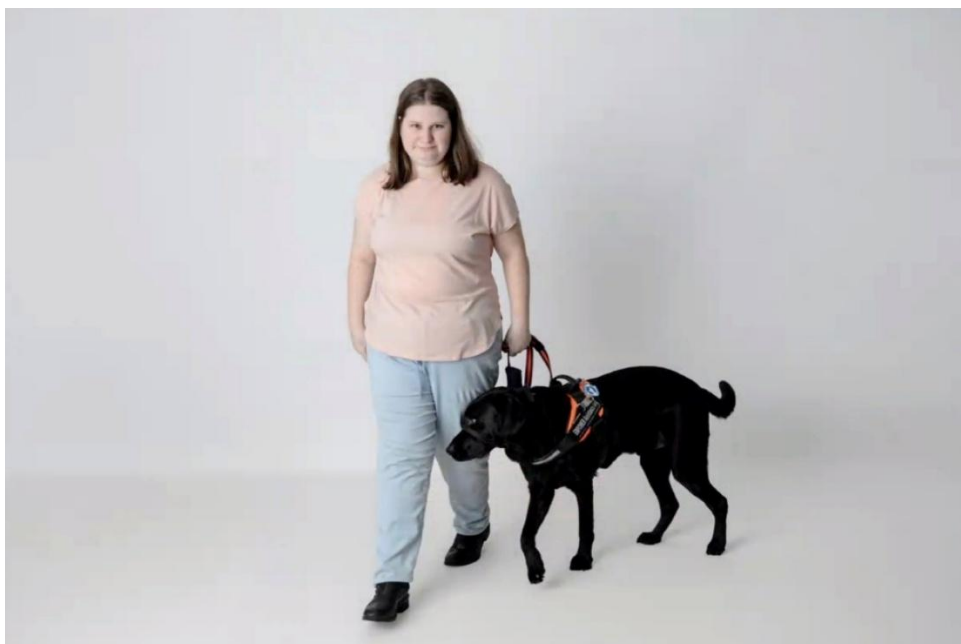
# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- Support balance and body awareness when walking by providing proprioceptive feedback (i.e. awareness of body's position in space), such as through contact with the AD.
- Assisting with reaching and fetching

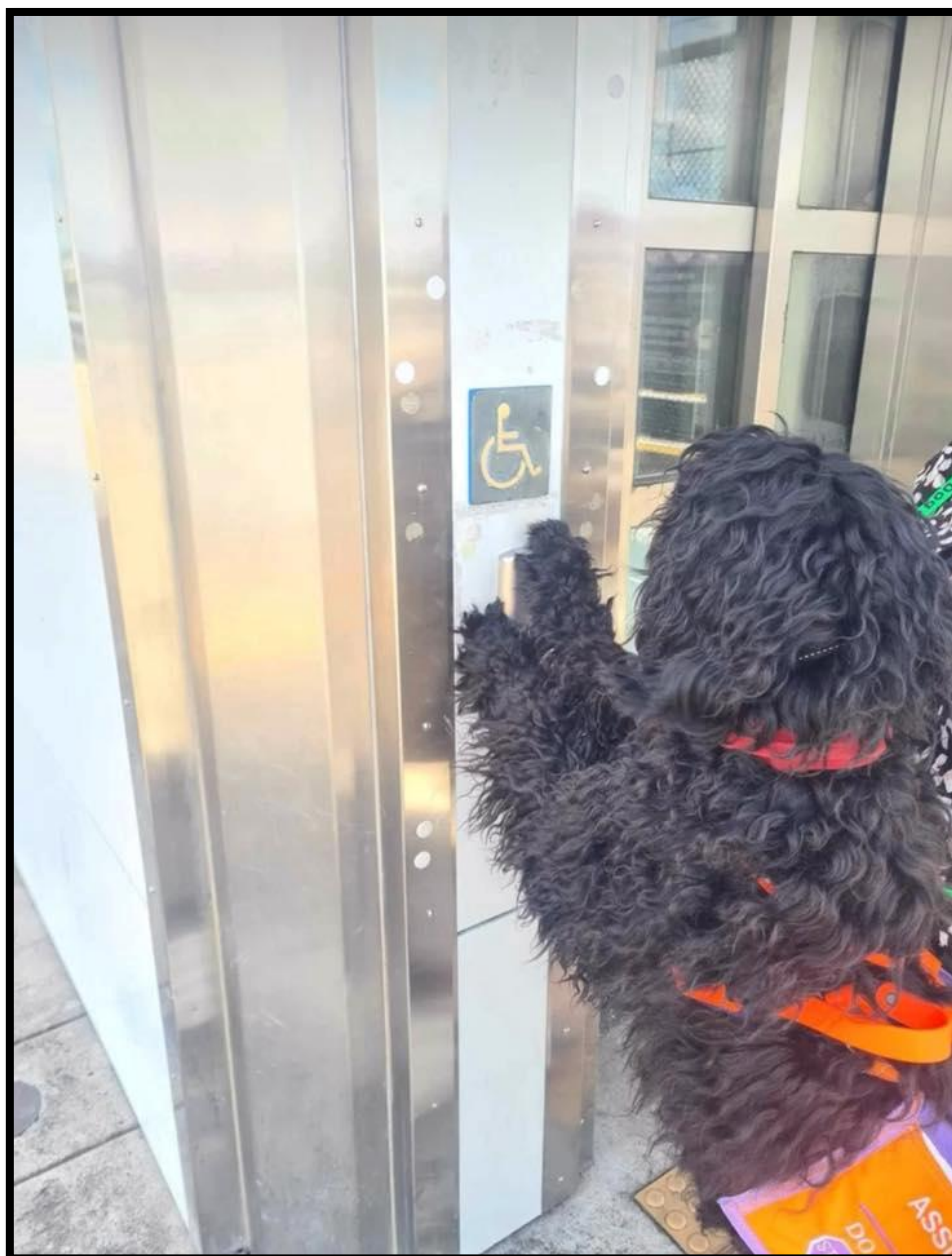
*“He brings me my meds. He brings my water. He alerts parents to seizures by pressing a bell.”*

*“My symptoms are altered gait, weakness on either my left side or right side of body and means at the time of symptom flares I have difficulty walking. I use my **AD primarily mobility**. He helps me walk up and down stairs - walking in general and pulling (momentum) when tired. **These skills mitigate the very neurological symptoms of FND and help my brain and neuro plasticity, additionally reducing falls and injuries that could potentially mean hospital admissions.**”*



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



## 4.2 What outcomes do Assistance Dogs help people with FND achieve?

Assistance dog help people with FND manage their symptoms and achieve the following outcomes:

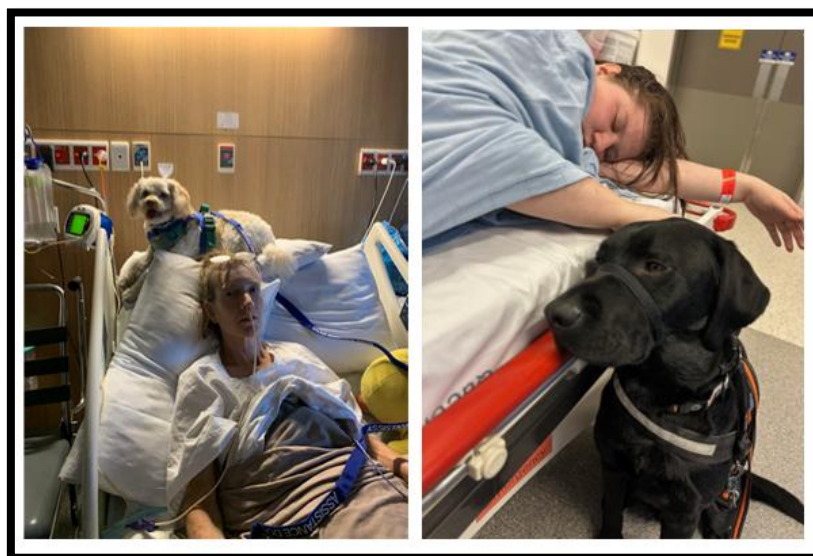
- **Improved Wellbeing and symptom management:** Co-regulation and self-regulation (helping the person restore a sense of calm)
  - *“He has the ability to keep me calm throughout my daily activities also as a great distraction from my limits throughout the day”*
  - *“Since I received my assistance dog I have been much less erratic and unpredictable and much calmer with more ability to stop and deal with frustration better. I suffer less distressing uncontrollable autistic shutdowns or melt downs. My house is safer because my assistance dog is with me 24/7 and can alert my carers, I need help if a seizure comes on quickly.”*
- **Symptom Management:** Decreasing frequency of seizures / drop attacks / falls
  - *“There are times I have an FND flare that reduces my capacity to bed rest only. [My AD] stays with me and leans her body against mine. She nudges my hand using her nose and I breathe with her to help remain in the present. She alerts and will block the doorway when she knows I am not well and should not leave. She leads me back to the bed, or my recliner chair and applies her body weight as deep pressure therapy. These interventions help me to recognise when my body is fatiguing, and my episodes of total bed rest have reduced because **she tells me when I need to slow down**. She interrupts me working on my laptop or nudges my phone away if I need to rest. The cycle of stress-fatigue-incapacity is less debilitating because I am taking action (rest or shifting) before I have an acute flare. FND triggers my PTSD and major depression. **These outcomes occur less regularly now. I can achieve mental tasks with more regularity and efficiency.**”*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- **Improved Independence:** Participants reported improved independence, being less reliant on formal and informal supports, and having improved relationships with informal supports. They reported that the AD provides life saving and life changing benefits.
  - *“He has made me feel more confident in being alone”*
  - *“My assistance dog has saved my life and given more freedom than I thought I even have again”*
  - *“I am able to stay alive because of my AD”*
  - *“Assistance dogs provide lifesaving care that you wouldn’t otherwise receive. The positive impact they have should not be overlooked”*
- **Reducing risk of injury** by alerting a handler prior to the onset of a seizure of FND episode, so the handler can get to the ground safely.
- **Reduced Healthcare costs:** Through the provision of alerts, safety and reducing autonomic arousal, handlers have reduced frequencies of hospital admissions. Handlers admitted to hospital with their Assistance Dog have reported reduced duration of hospital admissions, through faster recovery time.

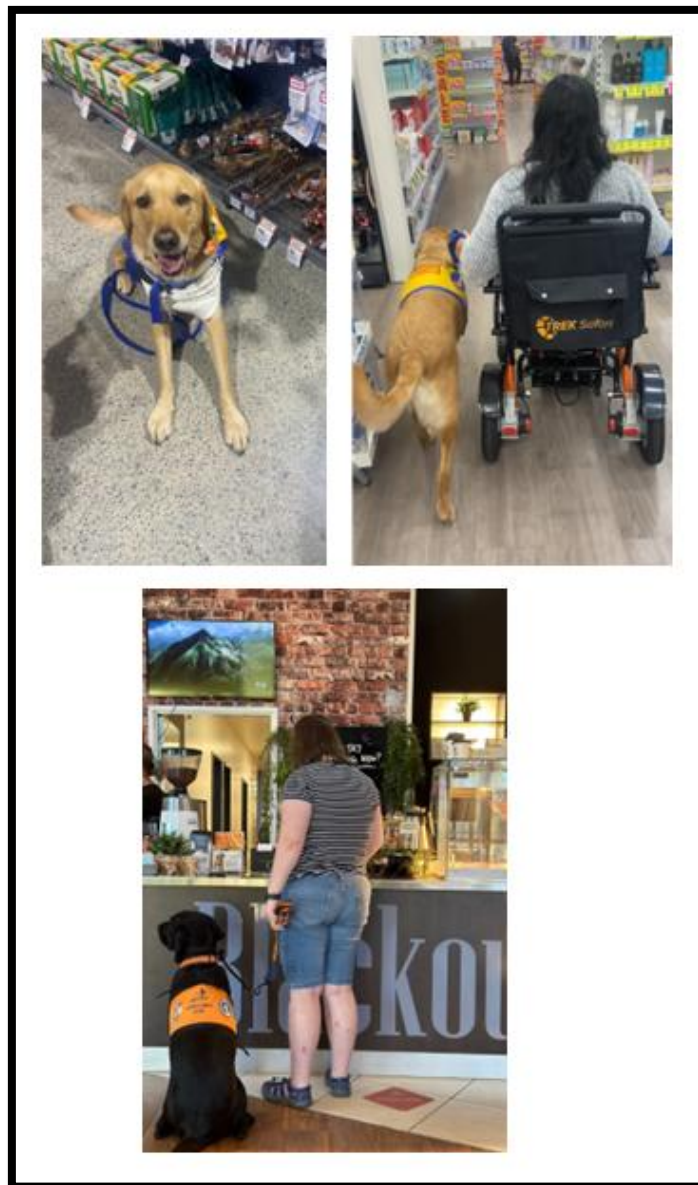
*“I have had a real reduction in the frequency and horror of seizures, ambulance call outs, hospital visits, use of PRN medication and distress of carers/parents.”*



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

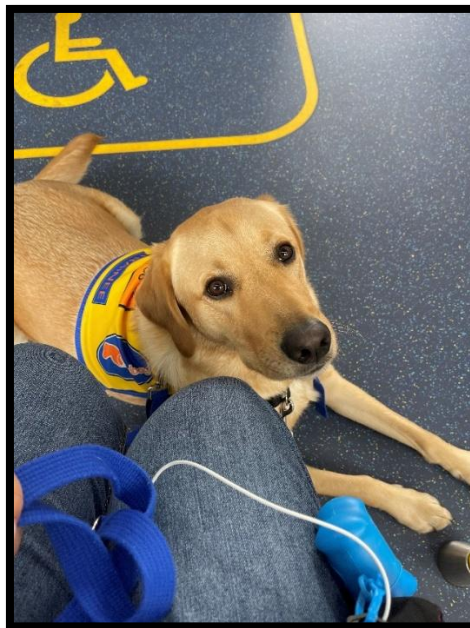
- **Social participation** by enabling the handler to leave the house and engage in the community and participate more independently and safely in the community.



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- Some participants reported being able **to independently access the community**, including flying interstate and using public transport with their assistance dog.



- Several participants commented they would not be able to leave their house without their AD. Knowing that their ADs will detect and respond to a seizure gives them the confidence to access the community and engage in activities. For one participant, this meant being able to drop her children off at school independently.

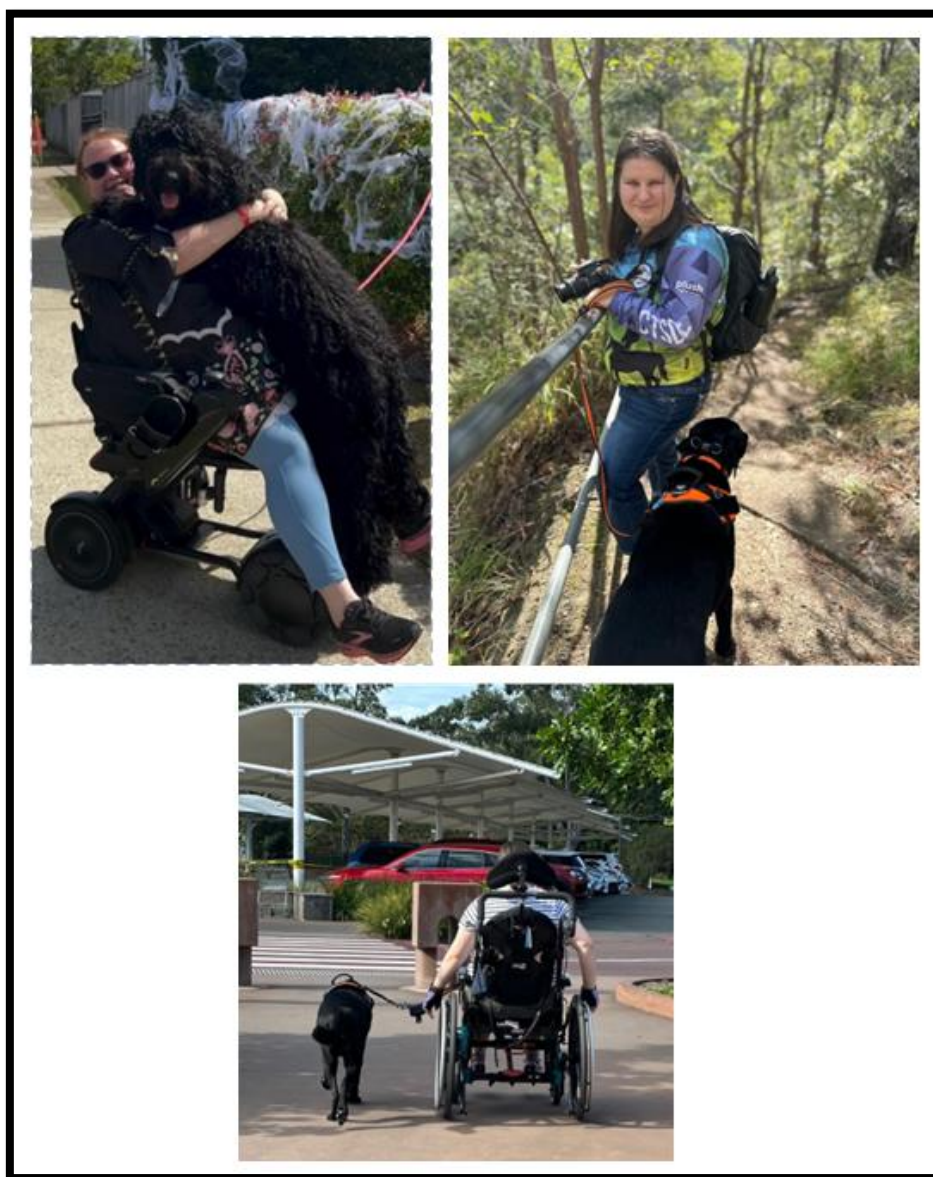
*My AD enables me to maintain highest level of independence as [the AD] knows what is needed each day with this fluctuating condition”*

*“AD has allowed me to be independent in community as I do not require a carer to help navigate infrastructure that hinders my mobility, reduces the vertigo and I’m able to participate socially and in community events. Prior to not having my AD I was unable to drop my kids off at*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*school safely or without my family being concerned for my safety. Another task he does is crowd control- this is a task that stops members of public from crowding myself, clearing my path."*



☎ 0412 363 287 ☎ 02 8072 6278



✉ info@fndaus.org.au 🌐 www.fndaus.org.au



**FND Australia**  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



☎ 0412 363 287 ☎ 02 8072 6278



✉ info@fndaus.org.au 🌐 www.fndaus.org.au



**FND Australia**  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- **Reduce Caregiver Burden:** Assistance dogs were found to reduce caregiver burden, provide confidence to the care giver that the AD will alert them, if the person with FND is at risk of a seizures. It was reported that the AD also helps to improve relationships with informal supports.

*"My parent lived in my room for 3 years. They have not lived in my room now since I got my assistance dog"*

*"AD don't seem to feel the emotional toll of this very needed care in the same way a human does. It is incredibly hard to sustain this needed emotional support to the pwd"*

- **Employment**

Participants reported that having access to an assistance dog has enabled them to continue working or return to work. The AD enabled them to better manage their disability with the constant presence of an AD. Some participants reported being able to engage in full time work, since acquiring an AD.

**In addition to paid work, assistance dogs have enabled handlers to engage in volunteer work, as well as study, school and tertiary education.**

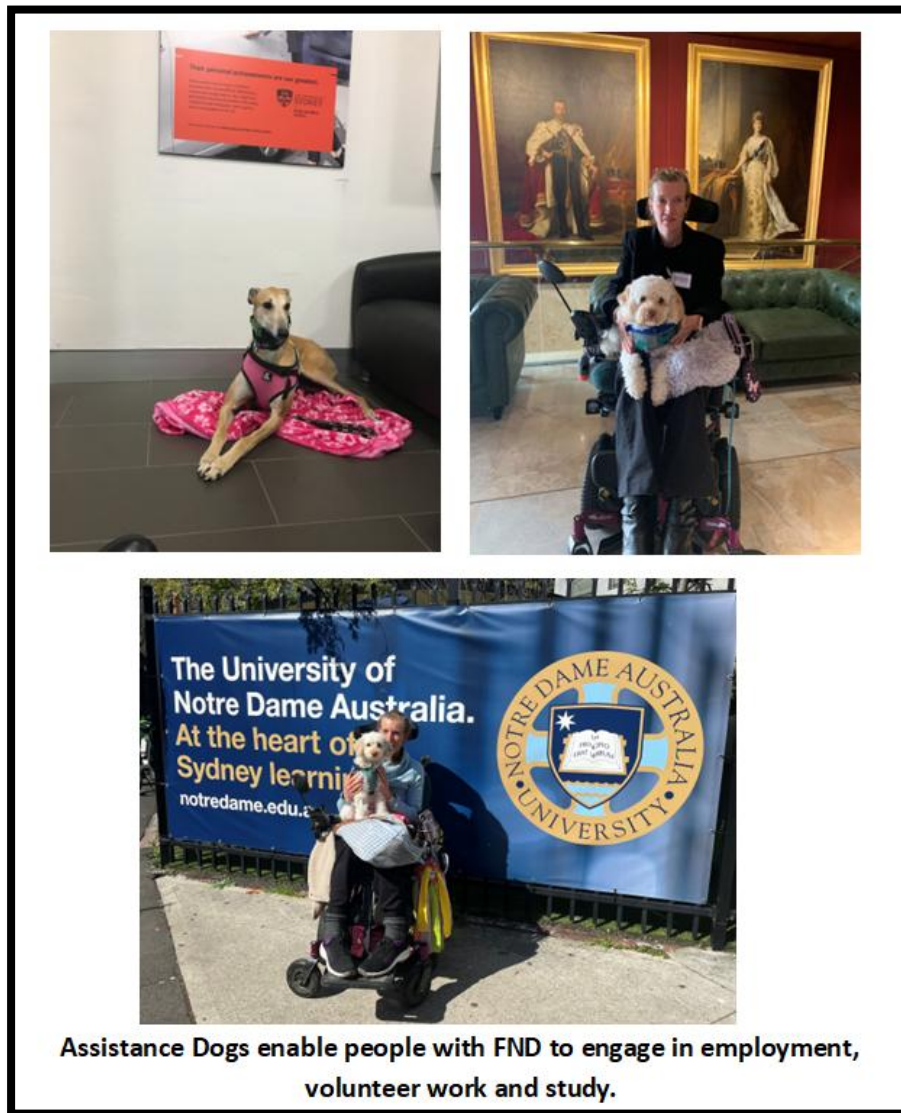
With handlers engaged in employment and productive pursuits, the assistance dogs help to reduce the burden on the economic environment, with their handlers able to contribute to the economy, social and economic environment.

- *"**There is no way I could work without my AD!** Before I had him, I was in and out of hospital all the time and constantly having seizures during every psychology appointment and so getting nowhere. It was only once I got Quigley and began working well together that I was able to make any progress!"*
- *"My AD provides seizure alert, stress reduction, deep pressure therapy, balance and the **freedom to now go to work full time**"*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- *“I now work full time with [AD], reduction in seizures, massive improvement to life”*
- *“What my AD has done for me has helped me to improve and return to my work and live my life.”*



Assistance Dogs enable people with FND to engage in employment, volunteer work and study.

## 4.3 Can other disability supports (e.g. assistive technology, standard seizure care, therapeutic supports etc.) help people with FND achieve the outcomes in the same way an assistance dog does?

Participants of the study agreed that the support an assistance dog provides is **unique** and therefore, cannot **be replaced by other disability supports. The AD performed tasks that could not be replaced by formal or informal supports.**

*“My supports don’t realise anything is happening until the dog alerts. So therefore, it doesn’t stop episodes. Whereas the **AD can alert before it happens** so therefore you can prevent them coming; by resting earlier or taking away the triggers earlier, no support person could do that.”*

*“It **is unique** in the fact the dog has an intact sense of what is happening before a support or professional so therefore intervention can happen earlier before anything major happens. Humans don’t have the capacity to read our body like dogs.”*

*“I don’t think anything comes close to the level of support that an assistance dog provides. I have an incredibly supportive family and an amazing support network. **Nothing comes close to the support of my AD**”*

*“Can a support worker cuddle up in bed with you when you are sore and tired. Recovering or seizing? Can assisted technology love you unconditionally. **Can it sense the change in your scent or heartbeat and gently wake and warn you of impending seizures** and look deeply into your eyes and say It’s ok mum, I’ve got you. And you know wherever you are you will wake up safe and protected. I think not. Not even a partner can offer such a service. Ask anyone with an assistance animal.”*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*“I have support workers come help me some of the day with my daily living stuff like meals and showers. They can’t sleep in my bed with me to keep me calm and my nervous system normal. They can hang out with me, but they **can’t lick my face and bring me back to consciousness like my dog does. They can’t change my mental health like my AD** does with his fierce loyalty and love and they can’t make me happy like he does when he looks at me with the funny looks on his face or puts a paw out for a high five. I can try ‘deep breathing’ or any other strategy all I like but **in primal brain state it’s my AD that helps the most.**”*

*“There is no comparison, she [AD] wakes me from nightmares, she guides me to **safety without having to be asked.** She can tell when my capacity is declining, where I might push through and end up incapacitated for longer. Human supports might suggest I rest but then I am choosing and often feel okay in that moment, **when my assistance dog notifies me, I need to rest, stop, sit etc I listen because she knows in advance of the full onset of the symptoms.**”*

ADs are available to **support 24/7**, unlike human support, in providing emotional co-regulation and reducing the onset of FND symptoms. On the other hand, the assistance support workers provide is time-constrained and support workers don’t necessarily fit into the person’s lifestyle / schedule.

*“My assistance dog is always with me. I don’t need to tell her what I need, in fact, she tells me. This helps me to feel less disabled and more independent.”*

*“The support is 24/7, I wouldn’t be here without my dog.”*

*“He [AD] is there 24 hours and does not switch off. Given the sporadic nature of this condition, he is there to assist when needed continuously.”*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

ADs provide a level of emotional support that is not directly comparable to other supports. Handlers do not have to feel guilty as they might when they are “burdening” someone to receive help. They do not have to ask their ADs to get their support.

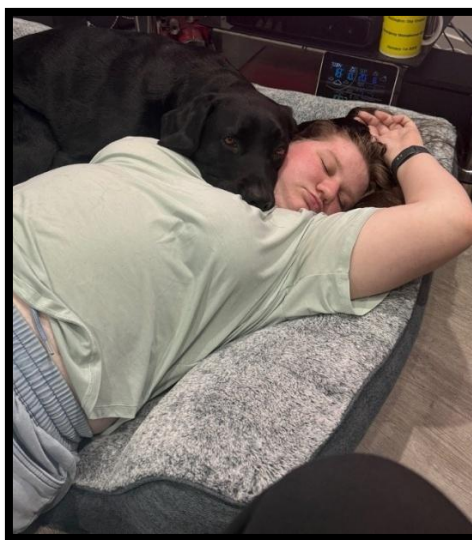
*"I don't have to prove my disability to [AD]. Well meaning humans often need convincing"*

*"So so different, I don't feel guilty that I am burdening anyone. He [AD] has no expectations of me, so I can be my true self"*

*"a dogs love is unconditional and a working dog breed loves to have a human as their 'Job'. My AD is very proud of their role in my life. I would not stay proactive without my AD. This disorder is too brutal."*

*"My assistance dog is often more comforting for me than any person could be. They are **unconditionally caring, supportive and are never judgmental**. They help induce calm and a peaceful, grounding experience for me."*

*"It's not judgemental, always available and I don't have to ask for it"*



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

ADs can **read their handler's specific physiological cues in a way that no other disability support can**. The AD alerts the handler of an oncoming seizure before a support worker can. As one participant puts it, "(My AD) is my brain and knows my body more than I do".

- ADs **can enhance the effect of other types of disability supports**. For example, the AD can help calm the person during a therapy session so that the person is grounded and regulated and able to benefit from the therapy session, hence the therapy sessions are more productive and effective. In addition, therapists can adjust their program according to the AD's signals that indicate if the person is feeling overstimulated or exhausted.

*"... he also helps Physio's and therapists to help me by watching his cues to adjust their program, so I'm not overstimulated or exhausted .... He will tell my support workers if I'm not listening to him and they will help me usually cause I'm feeling great, but my dog knows better. He is 99% right on all cues even when I'm in a hydrotherapy pool he will alert if I'm needing to get out."*

*"When some of what psychologist does is being done by the assistance dog, then work can be done on underlining problems that caused the FND, again lowering support needs over years."*

- Some people reported that their **Assistance Dogs were more effective than other formal supports or medical supports** in managing their symptoms and improving their outcomes.

*"I had psychology sessions for 10 years and I made very little progress but my dog has changed my life for the better."*

*"I don't have access to any other support workers as I have been denied NDIS. When I did have a psychologist, she did not understand FND at all. Besides being diagnosed in 2019 and doing CBT courses. **All of my recovery** from 6 seizures a day to 6 in the past 10 months is totally due to me*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*working with my AD. I have taught myself to walk and talk with their **compassion and non judgement.***

*“It’s like trying to compare apples to oranges. Like I said it doesn’t matter how much you practice your techniques or strategies you’ve been taught but when you’re autistic with multiple other neurological conditions and you get into fight and flight state the living, breathing, loving cuddles and kisses of a well-trained assistance dog restore your nervous system in ways no technology or even familiar human touch can do, let alone the touch (if allowed) of a support worker. Talking inflames the noise in my brain but the warmth and comfort of my assistance dog brings me down.*

*“He has reduced all my seizure and episodes. He has given me confidence to enter the community again. He was the one who taught me how to manage my disorder. Specialists can tell you, but they **can’t really help as much as an assistance dog who is there 24 hours a day.**”*

- Other people noted that the role of an **assistance dog was complementary to other supports**, who are also required.

*“There is a notable difference with my AD and support team, as my AD often identifies issues with my systems before a support worker can. We receive a warning ..This allows me to find a safe place to sit down. .. During events, both my AD and support worker play important roles. My AD remains nearby, providing deep pressure, while the support worker calls for help if needed and monitors my vitals and sugar levels as I become unresponsive. Additionally, other supports, such as physiotherapy and psychology, are also crucial in helping with my strength and other areas that my AD cannot address.”*

*“My AD cannot fully take over all other supports and allied health services due to my disability, as they are unable to call emergency services, communicate with doctors when I'm unresponsive, or help me express my feelings. While my AD can recognise certain cues before a human can, **support workers and my AD collaborate to provide the necessary help.**”*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*“none come close to being this level of support. **I still need to work with supports and technology** to gain the best productivity. My AD can't drive for example, but nobody has come close to knowing my disability as my assistance dog does every day and night.”*

*“I desperately want the NDIS to seek to gain a working knowledge of how **assistance dogs save lives** and allocate the respect their services deserve. **Nobody wants 24/7 human support.** The **goal is to live as independently as we can.** Our assistance dogs never roll their eyes when we ask them to do something. They don't call in sick or arrive late to a shift. **They don't judge.** Every single day my assistance dog helps me to overcome the barriers of being in my community. She does it without complaining and she makes my life exponentially better. **I am alive today because of the support of my assistance dog,** and her predecessor (as she is my second). My willingness to do what I need to do to have her helping me **is saving the NDIS an extraordinary amount of money.** I'd like to be acknowledged for my efforts of recovery. My life is hard. I live it anyway.”*

0412 363 287 02 8072 6278



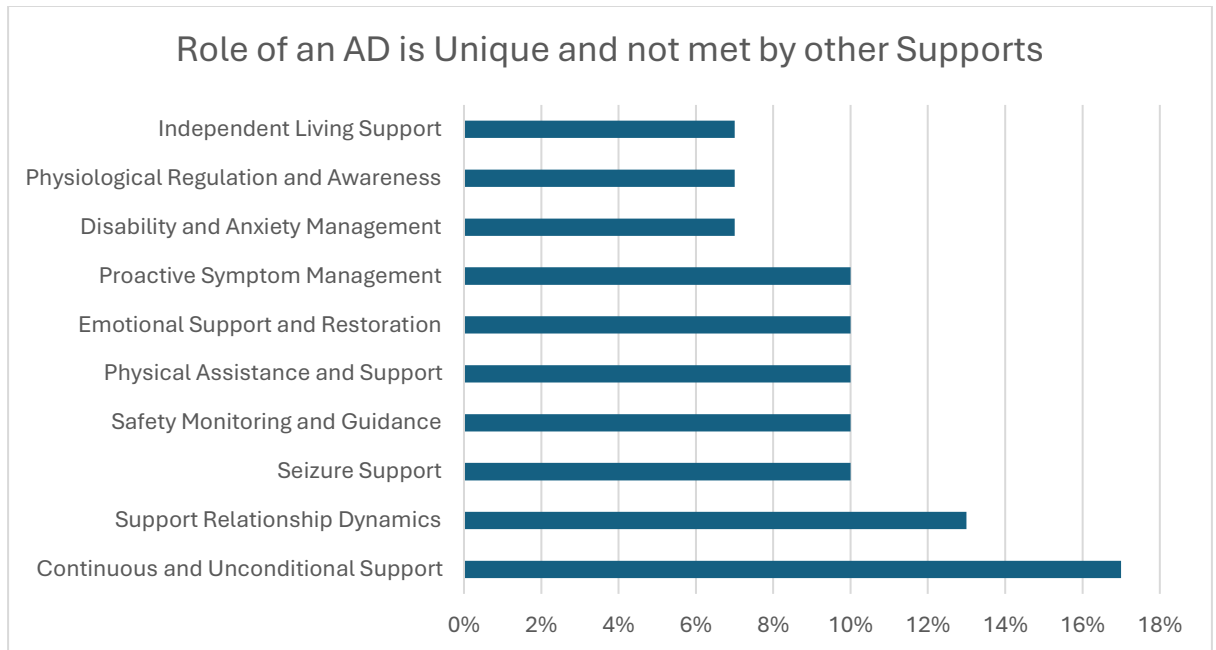
info@fndaus.org.au www.fndaus.org.au



FND Australia  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



## SUMMARY

**The AD performs a unique role that is not possible to achieve with pet dogs, informal or formal supports or therapists.**

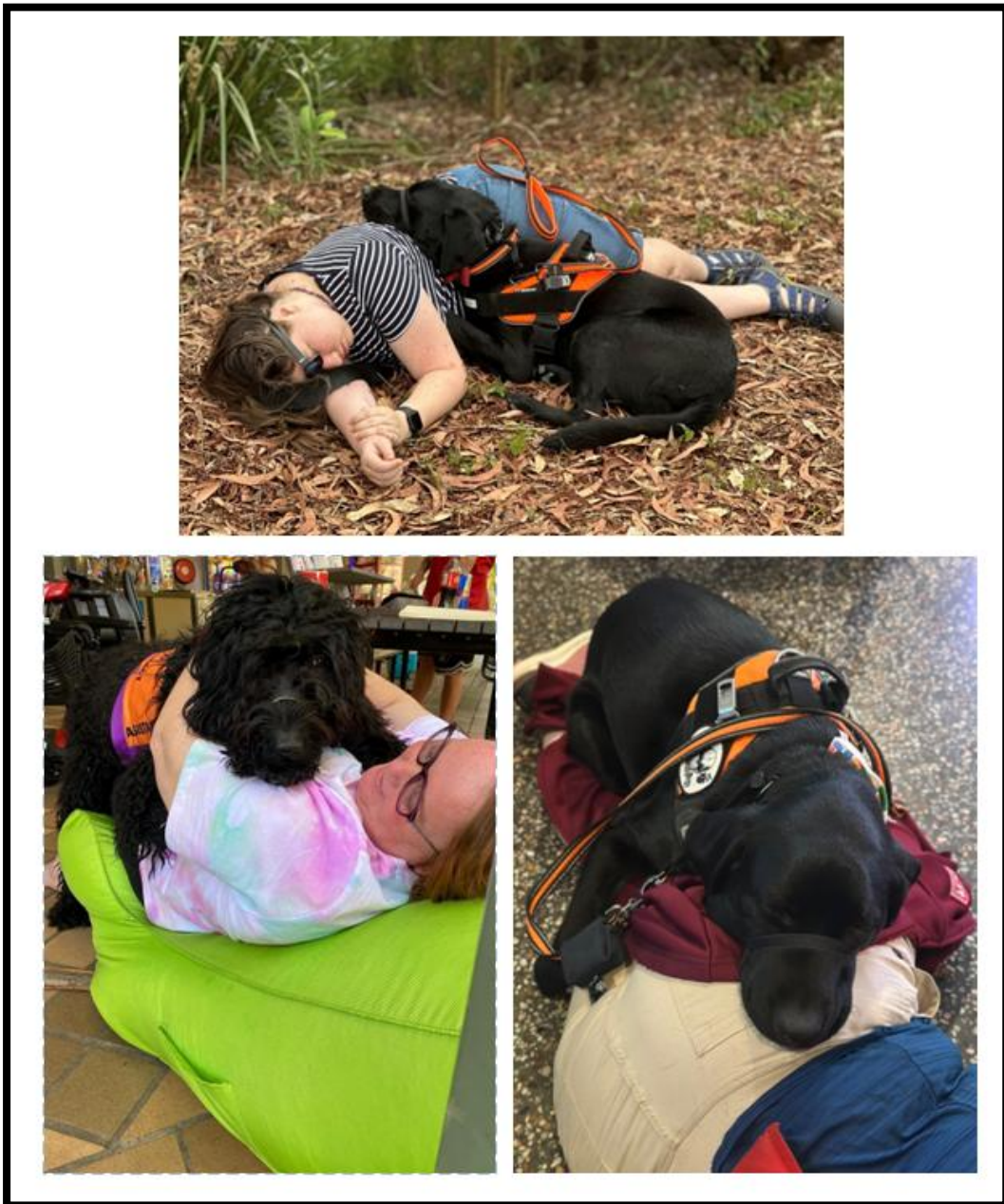
**The outcome of the unique tasks performed by the AD cannot be performed by support workers, therapist, low or high-cost AT.**

**The AD performs a unique role, which prevents or reduces costly hospital admissions, enables people to proactively manage health, attend appointments, and engage in productive activities.**

**The presence of the AD enables people to more effectively engage with therapists. Hence Assistance Dogs enable handlers to get more value for money from their therapy budgets.**

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842



## 4.4. Assistance Dog Training, Management and Finances

### Assistance Dog training

Participants' ADs were professionally trained to perform tasks such as seizure alert and deep pressure therapy, and to do public access work. 50% of individuals had their AD trained by a professional organisation, the other 50% reported working with a trainer to support the training of the AD.

There were mixed responses related to the training. Some reported if left to do it all alone it could potentially trigger symptoms, but many noted that working alongside a trainer, while owner training enabled a better bond with the assistance dog.

Different organisations were mentioned in response to the question. There was no one specific organisation, used by people with FND.

Benefits of the person with FND being involved in the training included:

- *"the care needs and responses are often very specific to the pwd"*
- *"I believe you create a better bond with a dog if you train the dog alongside a trainer"*

Challenges included:

*"It would be hard to train a dog purely by yourself if you have FND, as the training at first can be a trigger to your symptoms and you can get overwhelmed, so this needs to be watched by a professional trainer and family so you aren't too overwhelmed and triggered"*



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

## Who takes care of the ADs when participants are unable to?

Participants reported that they have family to look after their ADs if or when they cannot, and otherwise the Assistance Dog is always with them. No additional costs were noted, if the participant was unable to care for the dog in hospital [or for any other reason].

## Cost of training and maintaining an AD

Most participants were self-funding their ADs. Consequently, participants struggled with managing the costs associated with their ADs. One participant reported she had an Assistance Dog fully funded by DVA.

In terms of **training costs**, this varies depending on the trainer used and the number of lessons the AD requires for the tasks it needs to perform. Participants estimated this **at around \$35K - \$75K total** when going through a company. For people doing owner trained assistance dogs working with a trainer e.g. through the mindDog program, the cost appears significantly less depending on the frequency of sessions, ranging from weekly to monthly (**\$100-\$250 per lesson** with a trainer).

The cost of the Assistance Dog varied dramatically. For those who went through an organisation, the assistance dog cost was included in the provision of a fully trained assistance dog. For others they reported anywhere from \$600 to several thousands of dollars to purchase a dog, and then to train up the dog to assistance dog standards.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

In terms of yearly **maintenance costs**, it is estimated at around **\$9000-\$12,000 [\$1300 per month]**. As dogs age veterinary costs may increase. The cost breakdowns below were provided by participants.

Table 1.- Example of AD annual maintenance costs

| Item Description                             | Frequency          | Cost                | Annual expense |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Biologically appropriate raw food (BARF)     | 440g x twice daily | \$8.20 daily        | \$2,993        |
| Prime 100 SPD Cooked Roll (training treats)  | 150g Daily         | \$1.80 daily        | \$657          |
| Nexguard Spectra (flea, tick, worms)         | 1 chew x monthly   | \$110 / 6pk         | \$220          |
| Big Dog canine Probiotic                     | 5g x once daily    | \$1.30 daily        | \$474          |
| Professional Style Groom (large-extra large) | 10x per annum      | \$115 per groom     | \$1,150        |
| Annual Booster Vaccination                   |                    | \$200               | \$200          |
| Pet insurance (cover of your choice)         |                    | \$102-115 per month | \$1,300        |
| Collar, Harnesses, Leads (2m & 5m)           | As needed          |                     | \$400          |
| Bowls, Toys, Bedding                         | As needed          |                     | \$600          |
| PAT Re-assessment                            |                    |                     | \$300          |
| PAT Preparation                              |                    |                     | \$800          |
| Replacement Vest                             |                    |                     | \$60           |
|  |                    | Sub-total:          | \$9,154        |

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

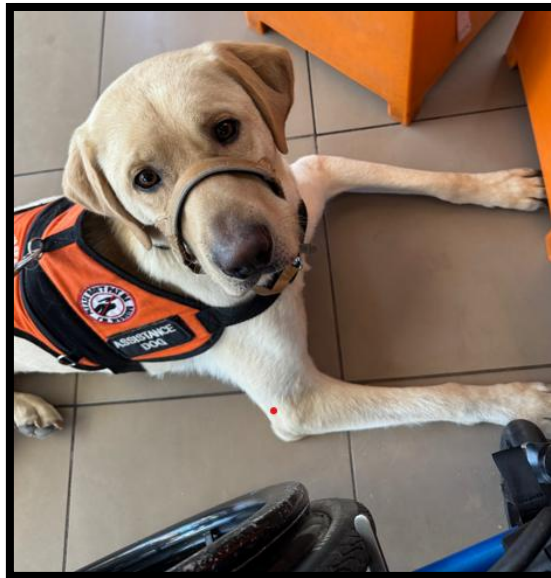


Table 2- Example of AD annual maintenance costs

| Item Description   | Frequency        | Cost             | Annual expense |
|--|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Pet insurance  | 1x per month     | \$150 x 12 moths | \$1,800        |
| Pet food   | As needed        |                  | \$3,000        |
| Flea, tick, worm prevention tablets                              | 1x month         |                  |                |
| Boots (for hot weather)  | 1x purchase      | \$200            | \$200          |
| Grooming   | 1x every 6 weeks | \$150 x 9        | \$1,350        |
| Training (required by DDA) and public access standard assessment | Ongoing          |                  | \$1,500        |
| Annual Vaccines and health checks                                | 1x annum         |                  | \$300          |
| Guide harness  | As needed        |                  | \$500          |
|  |                  | Sub-total:       | \$8,650        |

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

Table 3- Example of AD annual maintenance costs

| Item Description            | Frequency           | Cost              | Annual expense |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Pet food                    | As needed           | \$375 x 12 months | \$4,500        |
| Veterinary care             | As needed           |                   | \$820          |
| De-sexing                   | 1x per pet lifetime |                   | \$940          |
| Health management           | As needed           |                   | \$668          |
| Annual testing              | 1x per annum        |                   | \$1100         |
| Annual Council Registration | 1 x per annum       |                   | \$30           |
|                             |                     | Sub-total:        | \$8,058        |

## 4.5. Challenges faced using Assistance Dogs outdoors

Participants reported having to deal with certain frustrations when using their ADs in public spaces:

- **Unwanted petting by strangers:** This distracts the ADs from their primary task, which is to assist their owners with FND. One participant reported that despite repeated refusals in response to a stranger's request to pet her dog, this stranger had proceeded to tell her children to pet her assistance dog anyway.

*"The public people can be awful. So, this is where an individual needs to be able to advocate for their assistance dog. People can be quite negative or over friendly both are hard to deal with."*

- **Unsolicited questions by strangers about their FND:** Having to explain to strangers that their dog is an AD can elicit unwanted questions and comments such as "What's wrong with you?" / "You look fine". This is particularly the case since FND is an invisible condition, so having members of the public assume it can only be a disability if it is visible is often an invalidating experience for participants with FND. In addition, people faced

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

stigma related to the breed of the dog, with the public not understanding that any breed of dog may be trained to be an AD.



*“our assistance dogs were initially deemed too 'dumb and stubborn' to be trained. We obviously proved them wrong, but we were blown away by the views that Labradors and retrievers were the best breeds for service.”*

*“we have been told so many times 'Bulldogs aren't service dogs' and we have been asked to show credentials many times.”*

*“I have been questioned on my dogs breed and if he's suitable for a service dog as he's not the typically seen service dogs”*

- **ADs being attacked by unaccompanied dogs:** One participant highlighted the importance of the handler's ability to advocate for their AD's safety. One participant reported that her first Assistance Dog had to retire after being attacked by an unleashed and uncontrolled dog. This attack resulted in severe dog injury, requiring surgery, and

caused severe dog anxiety and the Assistance Dog could no longer do public access work.

- **Lack of accessibility for ADs:**
  - **Ride hailing services:** Participants reported incidents where drivers e.g. taxis, Ubers have declined transport upon seeing their ADs.
  - **Airplane flights:** One participant reported having mixed experiences booking flights with airlines. For instance, she has had to explain the airline policy to airline staff who were unaware of their own policy vis-a-vis getting an extra seat for her AD. She has also been told by airline staff that she doesn't need to fly with her AD if she's flying with her husband, not recognising that the AD serves a specific purpose in managing her disability.
  - **Hotels / AirBnBs:** Participants reported incidents of having to pay a 'clean-up' fee for their AD. In Australia, this is illegal under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and is seen as an act of discrimination against people with disabilities who use ADs.
  - **Hospitals:** At certain emergency departments, some participants reflected that they had to face long periods of questioning, resulting in delays before their ADs could join them. Other incidents were also reported such as having denied overnight accommodation for ADs during hospital stays. In addition, some hospitals also require paperwork and prior approval for entry of the AD each time.
  - **Public Spaces:** A participant noted that there is a lack of accessibility in buildings and toilets for the space of an AD and wheelchair.
- **Financial costs of AD and / or training:** The majority of participants spoke about the financial burden of acquiring and maintaining an AD. One participant had the AD fully funded by DVA. All other participants were required to self-fund the AD.

*"Cost of proper care is **expensive on a DSP**"*

*"**Definitely financial difficulties**, accessing trainers they can be expensive"*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*“The financial strain is significant. Every week I have to make difficult decisions to **put her [AD] needs ahead of my own.** This impacts my health as there are times **when I cannot afford to feed myself or attend appointments.**”*

*“We had to seek charity **to fundraise to get the assistance dog.** We still have to seek charity to help feed him or pay vet bills so we can eat and buy groceries. He hadn't had worming/flea tablets for too long as they're too expensive on a pension.”*

*“having to arrange **emergency surgery** for our assistance dog after he was attacked by the Great Dane was awful. It put us in a position that we had to **cancel medical appointments to pay for his treatment.** we would do this time and time again if we had to, but we should not have had to go through this.”*

*“The cost of living is impossible even without an assistance dog.”*

- Many participants reported they had not been supported by the NDIS / had the assistance dog application **declined by the NDIA.**

*“My assistance dog was **rejected as an official NDIS support** due to the NDIS being more concerned with his welfare than mine.”*

*“Currently, we do not have NDIS coverage for my assistance dog. We have submitted a comprehensive report from an Animal Occupational Therapist. However, **our application was rejected.**”*

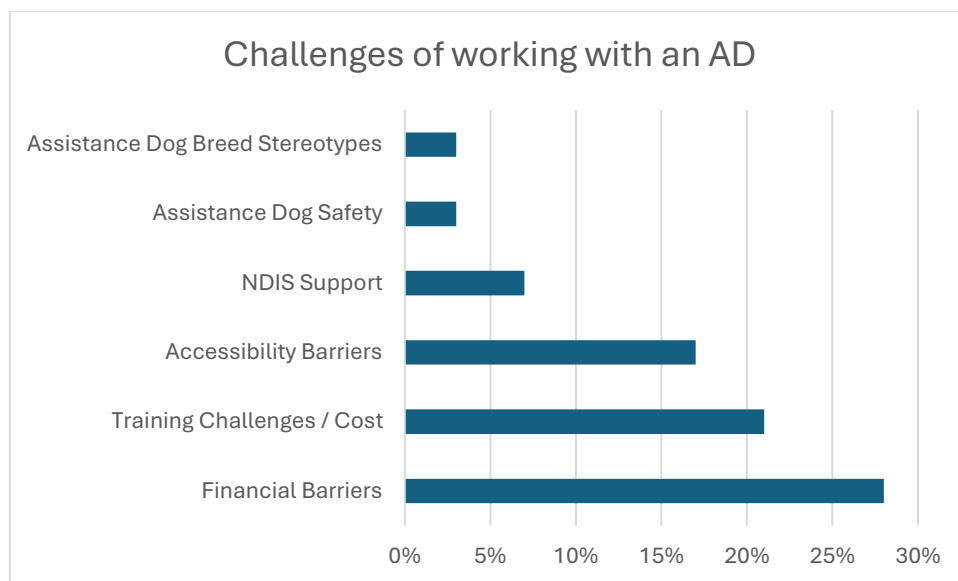
*“No. It's practically impossible. The process is exhausting and costs a lot of money for reports and takes so long and is **psychologically overwhelming just to be declined.** The reasons given for declining are never reasonable. Asking for more evidence when the evidence provided hasn't been read.”*

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

*“the **NDIS denied our claim** for his ongoing costs. He [AD] has made me live very frugally but I’m still negatively financially impacted and often take weeks to pay off vet bills etc. I didn’t think he would cost this much.”*

- **Discrimination by Employers:** It was reported that a workplace had incorrectly assumed that individuals who need ADs cannot work. Other group participants reported positive experiences in the workplace and that the workplace was not sure what to do but was open to learning and accommodating.



## 5. NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME ACT 2013 - SECT 34 - NDIS Reasonable and Necessary Criteria – FND and Assistance Dogs

The provision of Assistance Dogs for people with a disability impairment attributed to FND, meets the criteria of Reasonable and necessary supports in the NDIS Act 2013 (34)

**Section 34(1)(a) the support will assist the participant to pursue the goals, objectives and aspirations included in the participant's statement of goals and aspirations.**

Participants described their assistance dogs as “life-saving,” enabling them to participate in community life, engage in employment and academic study, and access necessary health services and therapies. Assistance dogs were reported to enhance quality of life and directly support goals related to capacity building, community participation, and social and economic engagement. Many participants highlighted the independence and freedom their assistance dog provided, noting that these outcomes aligned closely with their personal goals and aspirations.

**Section 34(1)(b) the support will assist the participant to undertake activities, so as to facilitate the participant's social and economic participation.**

Participants reported that having an assistance dog enabled them to engage in full-time employment, noting that they would be unable to work without this support. Assistance dogs also allowed individuals to access the community and participate in social activities that enhanced their quality of life. Many participants described being unable to leave their homes without the continuous support provided by their assistance dog.



# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

**Section 34(1)(c) the support represents value for money in that the costs of the support are reasonable, relative to both the benefits achieved and the cost of alternative support.**

It was identified that the assistance dog reduced the caregiver burden and had the potential to reduce some support worker hours, and made therapy support more effective reducing the need for psychological services.

The assistance dog provided a constant 24/7 support, reducing the demand on formal and informal supports. The relative cost of an assistance dog compared to less effective 'human' supports were significant.

The assistance dog worked as part of a team with formal supports. Support workers and practitioners relied on cues from the assistance animal as part of the therapy or supports. The presence on an assistance dog enabled the handler to more effectively engage with their formal supports.

**Section 34(1)(d) The support will be, or is likely to be, effective and beneficial for the participant, having regard to current good practice.**

Assistance dogs for people with FND provide a unique and effective role in alleviating functional impairments associated with the impairments caused by FND disability (s 34(1)(d) NDIS Act).

Assistance dogs are recognised as an evidence-based intervention that improves mental health outcomes, daily functioning, community participation, and safety for people with seizures, autism and psychosocial disability (s 34(1)(d) NDIS Act-Effective and Beneficial). They provide unique, real-time symptom management not achievable through other supports, making them a reasonable and necessary.

The consultation process has demonstrated the important and complementary role that AD has in **alleviating the debilitating impacts of FND.**

The Assistance Dog **is trained to detect a change** in their handler's autonomic arousal, **and to respond** in an appropriate way to meet the handler's unique needs. This **ability to detect**

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

**physiological changes in a person, cannot be achieved by a human**, whether it be a support worker or a therapist. In addition, the **is always present 24/7 to provide appropriate intervention** to manage its handler's disability impairments, in a way that is **cost effective and value for money** compared to having a human / support worker / therapist present 24/7. A human support cannot fulfil the role of an AD.

**Section 34(1)(e) the funding or provision of the support takes account of what it is reasonable to expect families, carers, informal networks and the community to provide.**

The Assistance dog was found to offer a unique role as part of the holistic management of FND. It was identified that no human, whether formal or informal supports, could fulfil the role of an Assistance Dog.

It was found that the constant presence of an assistance dog did reduce caregiver burden, both formal and informal supports, as the dog was able to predict the onset of symptoms, alert the carer, and ensure the safety of the handler.

**Section 34(1)(f) the support is most appropriately funded or provided through the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and is not more appropriately funded or provided through other general systems of service delivery or support services offered by a person, agency or body, or systems of service delivery or support services offered: (i) as part of a universal service obligation; or (ii) in accordance with reasonable adjustments required under a law dealing with discrimination on the basis of disability.**

The support provided by an assistance dog addresses the handler's disability needs, and an equivalent level of support is not offered via health, education or other system.

**(2) The National Disability Insurance Scheme rules may prescribe methods or criteria to be applied or matters to which the CEO is to have regard, in deciding whether or not he or she**



0412 363 287



02 8072 6278



info@fndaus.org.au



www.fndaus.org.au



FND Australia  
Support Services Inc

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

**is satisfied as mentioned in any of paragraphs (1)(a) to (f). Rule 5.1(a): The support(s) is not likely to cause harm to participant or pose risk to others.**

The consultation did not identify any cases in which an assistance dog caused harm to the participant or pose risk to others.

- All the participants spoke about how the assistance dog kept them safe from harm.
- One participant mentioned that an off leash Great Dane dog attacked her assistance dog, grabbing her assistance dog around the neck and shaking it. This participant could not keep working her assistance dog after this attack.
- Many of the participants were also dependent on wheelchairs in addition to the assistance dog. No injuries from wheelchairs were reported. Participants indicated that the assistance dog easily adapted to wheelchair use.
- In no cases had any person or animal been injured by an assistance dog, as per accreditation standards for the Public Access Test.

## 6. Summary

### Assistance Dogs, FND & NDIS Reasonable & Necessary Support

Assistance Dogs (ADs) provide essential, disability-specific support for people with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) and functional seizure. Participant evidence consistently shows that ADs deliver unique, real-time safety, regulation, and functional assistance that cannot be replicated by human supports, informal care, or assistive technology. Across the consultation, ADs were described as “life-saving,” “life-changing,” and critical to maintaining independence, community access, and economic participation.

#### 1. How Assistance Dogs Support People With FND

People with FND experience unpredictable episodes including seizures, collapse, dissociation, gait disturbances, paralysis, sensory overload, and autonomic instability. ADs mitigate these risks through specialised tasks that directly prevent harm and support daily functioning.

**Early warning and prevention:** ADs detect subtle physiological and behavioural changes—such as shifts in heart rate, scent, dissociation cues, or neurological fluctuations—alerting the handler before they are aware of an episode. This allows the person to sit, rest, or move to safety, preventing injuries and reducing episode severity.

**Support during episodes:** ADs provide grounding, deep pressure therapy, tactile stimulation, and sustained presence to reduce shock, confusion, and overstimulation. They can alert carers, stay alongside the handler until recovery, and reduce the need for ambulance or hospital intervention.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

**Mobility and physical stability:** ADs assist with balance, gait, bracing, proprioception, and falls prevention, reducing hospital presentations and improving confidence in the community.

**Environmental safety and daily living:** They create safe physical space in public, guide to quiet areas, manage overstimulation, fetch medication or items, and facilitate safe transitions during fatigue or neurological flares.

**Emotional regulation and wellbeing:** ADs provide instant co-regulation, reducing PTSD triggers, shutdowns, meltdowns, and autonomic dysregulation. Their presence reduces isolation for people who are housebound.

**Independence and participation:** ADs enable work, study, volunteering, school drop-offs, appointments, and community access that would otherwise be unsafe or impossible.

**Reduced caregiver burden:** Families experience relief from constant monitoring responsibilities, improved sleep, reduced anxiety, and more sustainable support arrangements.

## 2. Why Assistance Dogs Are unique and not comparable to alternative supports

Participants emphasised that ADs offer unique capabilities unmatched by any other support:

- Early physiological detection cannot be replicated by humans or technology.
- ADs provide continuous 24/7 monitoring, including overnight support.
- Emotional co-regulation is immediate, non-verbal, and free of guilt or burden.
- ADs enhance—not replace—therapy and support worker effectiveness.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- No assistive technology can predict seizures, apply DPT, or provide relational stabilisation.

ADs enable safe, independent living without requiring constant human supervision.

### 3. Barriers and Challenges

Despite their benefits, handlers face significant barriers:

- **Public interference**, intrusive questions, and stigma around non-traditional AD breeds.
- **Safety risks**, including attacks from uncontrolled dogs.
- **Access barriers** across transport, airlines, accommodation, hospitals, and public facilities.
- **Financial strain**, with many self-funding AD costs and experiencing hardship.
- **NDIS barriers**, including rejected applications despite strong evidence, inconsistent decision-making, and emotionally taxing processes.

### 4. Alignment With NDIS Reasonable & Necessary Criteria (s34)

The evidence strongly supports ADs as a Reasonable & Necessary support:

- **(s34(1)(a))** ADs directly support goals relating to independence, capacity building, community access, work/study, and safety.
- **(s34(1)(b))** ADs enable social and economic participation that would otherwise be restricted.
- **(s34(1)(c))** ADs provide significant value for money, reducing support worker hours and crisis healthcare costs. The constant calming presence of an AD allows for more effective therapy.
- **(s34(1)(d))** ADs deliver effective, evidence-based functional and safety benefits for FND.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- **(s34(1)(e))** No informal support can provide continuous early detection or real-time intervention.
- **(s34(1)(f))** ADs are most appropriately funded by the NDIS, as no mainstream system offers equivalent support.
- **(s34(2))** All participating dogs were safe, passed Public Access Tests, and caused no harm.



## 7. References

- Aybek, S., & Perez, D. L. (2022). Diagnosis and management of functional neurological disorder. *Bmj*, 376.
- Carson, A., Stone, J., Hibberd, C., Murray, G., Duncan, R., Coleman, R., . . . Cavanagh, J. (2011). Disability, distress and unemployment in neurology outpatients with symptoms 'unexplained by organic disease'. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, 82(7), 810-813.
- Cole, R. H., Elmalem, M. S., & Petrochilos, P. (2023). Prevalence of autistic traits in functional neurological disorder and relationship to alexithymia and psychiatric comorbidity. *Journal of the Neurological Sciences*, 446, 120585.
- Diez, I., Larson, A. G., Nakhate, V., Dunn, E. C., Fricchione, G. L., Nicholson, T. R., . . . Perez, D. L. (2021). Early-life trauma endophenotypes and brain circuit-gene expression relationships in functional neurological (conversion) disorder. *Molecular psychiatry*, 26(8), 3817-3828.
- Ducroizet, A., Zimianti, I., Golder, D., Hearne, K., Edwards, M., Nielsen, G., & Coebergh, J. (2023). Functional neurological disorder: Clinical manifestations and comorbidities; an online survey. *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience*, 110, 116-125.
- Gelauff, J., & Stone, J. (2016). Prognosis of functional neurologic disorders. In *Handbook of Clinical Neurology* (Vol. 139, pp. 523-541): Elsevier.
- González-Herrero, B., Morgante, F., Pagonabarraga, J., Stanton, B., & Edwards, M. J. (2022). Autism Spectrum Disorder May Be Highly Prevalent in People with Functional Neurological Disorders. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 12(1), 299.
- Jackson, M. L. (2023). *Attachment Bond Experiences Among Adults Using Service Dogs to Mitigate Psychiatric Disabilities*. Walden University,
- Keynejad, R. C., Frodl, T., Kanaan, R., Pariante, C., Reuber, M., & Nicholson, T. R. (2019). Stress and functional neurological disorders: mechanistic insights. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, 90(7), 813-821.
- Lucchi, G., Crépin, M., Chambaron, S., Peltier, C., Gilbert, L., Guéré, C., & Vié, K. (2024). Effects of psychological stress on the emission of volatile organic compounds from the skin. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 7238.
- Luff, G. C., Belluomo, I., Lugarà, E., & Walker, M. C. (2024). The role of trained and untrained dogs in the detection and warning of seizures. *Epilepsy & Behavior*, 150, 109563.
- Martin, H. J., Turner, M., Bandelow, S., Edwards, L., Riazanskaia, S., & Thomas, C. (2016). Volatile organic compound markers of psychological stress in skin: a pilot study. *Journal of breath research*, 10(4), 046012.

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

- Mavroudis, I., Kazis, D., Kamal, F. Z., Gurzu, I.-L., Ciobica, A., Pădurariu, M., . . . Iordache, A. (2024). Understanding Functional Neurological Disorder: Recent Insights and Diagnostic Challenges. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, 25(8), 4470. Retrieved from <https://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/25/8/4470>
- Wilson, C., Campbell, K., Petzel, Z., & Reeve, C. (2022). Dogs can discriminate between human baseline and psychological stress condition odours. *PLoS One*, 17(9), e0274143.
- Woodward, S. H., Jamison, A. L., Gala, S., Lawlor, C., Villasenor, D., Tamayo, G., & Puckett, M. (2021). Tracking positive and negative affect in PTSD inpatients during a service dog intervention. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 89(6), 551.
- Woodward, S. H., Jamison, A. L., Gala, S., Villasenor, D., Tamayo, G., & Puckett, M. (2024). Physical activity and heart rate in PTSD inpatients: Moderation by custody of a service dog. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 180, 362-370.

## 8. Appendix

Survey developed to collect the data in this report. Questions were based on the 'Full set of questions', available at [NDIS Evidence Advisory Committee Consultation September 2025 - Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing - Citizen Space](#).

### Assistance Dogs and FND

The outcomes of this survey will be used to write a report to submit to the Advisory Committee on Assistance Dogs for NDIS. We want to gather the evidence around the role that Assistance Dogs can play in supporting FND.

No identifying information will be used. Your participation in this survey is voluntary.

1. How does your assistance dog [AD] help you manage your FND? Please provide specific examples of the tasks your AD does.
2. What outcomes does your assistance dog have in relation to your FND / disability? e.g. emotional regulation; reduce seizures; improve quality of life.
3. How does the support provided by your assistance dog compare to other supports e.g. support worker, psychology?
4. Are there other disability supports e.g. assistive technology, support work, allied health that could provide supports equivalent to your assistance dog?
5. In what way does the support provided from an assistance dog differ or is unique / not comparable to other supports e.g. support worker / psychology / assistive technology?

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

6. Was your assistance dog, trained by a professional organisation?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

7. Did you self-train / owner train your assistance dog?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

8. How long have you owned your assistance dog?

- Less than three months
- Three to 12 months
- More than 12 months
- Other (please specify)

9. Where do you use your assistance dog?

- Home
- Outdoors
- Public places
- Hospitals / Medical / health services
- Workplaces
- Schools / Educational centres
- Public Transport
- Other (please specify)

10. Who looks after your assistance dog when you are unable to e.g. in hospital?

11. If you require assistance to care for your assistance dog when you are unable to, what are the costs associated with this care?

12. How much did it cost to acquire and train your assistance dog?

# FND CLINIC PTY LTD

ABN: 15 666 642 842

13. How much does it cost to maintain and care for your assistance dog? Consider food, treats, veterinary care, medications, ongoing training, leads, harnesses etc.
14. Have you experienced any safety issues having an assistance dog - e.g. dog being injured by wheelchair etc. Please provide examples.
15. Have you experienced any challenges in owning an assistance dog e.g. training, access issues, financial concerns, caring for a dog etc.
16. Have you experienced any home / housing related barriers in having an assistance dog ? e.g. renting, pet friendly homes etc. Please provide any relevant examples.
17. Have you experienced any financial constraints in owning an assistance dog?
18. Is your assistance dog recognised by NDIS? If yes, how difficult / easy was it to get NDIS to recognise your Assistance Dog on your NDIS plan?
19. Have you experienced any discrimination / stigma or negative attitudes when using an assistance dog in public, health services, education, workplaces etc? Please provide examples.
20. Is there anything else you would like to add about your assistance dog.?

PLEASE NOTE: A report will be generated and submitted to the advisory committee on AD which is looking into the evidence of assistance dogs in relation to NDIS. All responses will remain anonymous, and no one will be personally identified in any output.

If you like to share photos publicly of your assistance dog, please email [kate@fndaus.org.au](mailto:kate@fndaus.org.au) with the photo and consent to use. Thanks for your input :) We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey and contributing to the evidence base of assistance dogs for FND.