



**Department of California
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation
April Bulletin**

The following information is provided in response to several inquiries about service dogs for Veterans.

Service Dog Veterinary Health Benefit

What are service dogs? Service dogs are guide or service dogs prescribed for a disabled veteran under 38 CFR 17.148 for the purpose of the veteran being diagnosed as having a visual, hearing, or substantial mobility impairment.

Recognized Service Dogs for the Insurance Benefit: The VA will recognize, for the purpose of paying benefits, the following service dogs: The dog and veteran must have successfully completed a training program offered by an organization accredited by Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation, or both (for dogs that perform both service and guide-dog assistance). The veteran must provide to the VA a certificate showing successful completion issued by the accredited organization that provided the program.

Does the VA provide Service Dogs? No. Veterans approved for service dogs are referred to Assistance Dogs International accredited agencies or International Guide Dog Federation accredited agencies.

Does a service dog serve the same function(s) as Animal Assisted Therapy or Animal Assisted Activity Dog? No. Animal Assisted Therapy and Animal Assisted Activity Dogs are used either assist therapists to accomplish therapeutic goals or for general engagement of the patients. Neither type of dog is for personal use by the Veteran. They are used only in a medical setting.

How can a Veteran apply for VA Veterinary Health Benefits?

Hearing, Guide, Mobility: The Veteran should meet with their VA Clinical Care Provider to begin the application process for this benefit. The specialist will complete an evaluation and make a clinical determination on the need for assistive devices, including a service dog. Once the evaluation is completed and a service dog is determined to be the optimal tool for the Veteran's rehabilitation and treatment plan, the provider will work with the Veteran to obtain the necessary information and documents to request the benefit on behalf of the Veteran through coordination with the local VA Medical Center Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service.

Mental Health Mobility: The Veteran should meet with a VA Mental Health Provider to begin the application process for the benefit. The mental health provider and care team will evaluate and determine whether the mental health condition is the primary cause of the Veteran's substantial mobility limitations. The team will also assess whether a mobility service dog would be the optimal intervention or treatment approach for the Veteran. If the team considers a service dog to be the optimal intervention, they will request the benefit on behalf of the Veteran through coordination with the local VA Medical Center Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service.

The Veteran will be informed of the approval or disapproval of their service dog request by the VA Prosthetics and Sensory Aid Service. Veterans approved for service dogs are referred to Assistance Dogs International or International Guide Dog Federation-accredited agencies.

Please contact the Prosthetic and Sensory Aid Service Department at your local VA Medical Center if you have questions or would like more information on the Service Dog Veterinary Health Benefit.

It's Time for End-of-Year Reporting!

Dates to Remember

- ✓ Unit End-of-Year Reports are due to the District VA&R Chairman by April 12.
- ✓ Unit Impact Reports are due to the District President by April 12.
- ✓ District End-of-Year Reports are due to the Department Chairman by May 1.
- ✓ District Impact Reports are due to the Department Secretary by May 1.

I look forward to receiving your reports and learning about the wonderful work accomplished in the VA&R program this year.

United As One,

Susan Baker, VA&R Chairman
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