

Service Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: What is the difference between a guide dog and a service dog?

A: A guide dog is trained to assist blind and visually impaired people by avoiding obstacles. A service dog is trained to help those with physical or hearing disabilities by alerting deaf and hearing impaired individuals to a variety of household sounds or by assisting in the performance of a wide variety of tasks depending on need and training (e.g. balance, retrieving, or pulling a wheelchair).

Q: How do I determine if I am eligible for a service dog through VA?

A: To receive any type of medical service through VA, you must register at the Health Administration/enrollment section of a VA Medical Center or online: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>. Once registered, a referral to a specialist may be requested through the assigned VA primary care provider. The specialist will complete an evaluation and make a clinical determination on the need for assistive devices, including a service dog. Each Veteran's case is reviewed and evaluated by a prescribing clinician for the following:

- Means to care for the dog currently and in the future
- Goals that are accomplished through the use of the dog
- Goals that are to be accomplished through other assistive technology or therapy

Q: Does VA actually provide the service dog?

A: No. Veterans approved for service dogs are referred to accredited agencies. There should be no charge for the dog or the associated training.

Q: If it is determined that I am eligible for a service dog, what benefits does VA provide for my service dog?

A: VA will pay for veterinary care and the equipment (e.g. harness and/or backpack) required for optimal use of the dog. Veterinary care includes prescribed medications, office visits for medical procedures, and dental procedures where the dog is sedated (one sedated dental procedure will be covered annually). Vaccinations should be current when the dog is provided to the Veteran through an accredited agency. Subsequent vaccinations will be covered by VA. Prescribed food will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Veterinary care does not include over-the-counter medications, food, treats and non-sedated dental care. Grooming, boarding and other routine expenses are not covered.

Q: Does a service dog serve the same function(s) as Animal Assisted Therapy or Animal Assisted Activity dogs?

A: No. Animal Assisted Therapy and Animal Assisted Activity dogs are used either to assist therapists to accomplish therapeutic goals or for social engagement of the patients. Neither type of dogs is for personal use by the Veteran. They are used only in a medical setting.