



SERVICE DOG / GUIDE DOG BENEFITS RULES

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to ensuring Veterans receive the benefits for which they qualify. VA implemented rules to codify the previous authorities for guide, hearing and mobility dogs into one regulation, 38 CFR 17.148, titled Service Dogs. VA does not provide service dogs (SD) or guide dogs (GD), but does provide veterinary health care and other benefits in support of guide dogs, and hearing and mobility service dogs to maximize the life and utility of these specialized dogs.

In order to receive benefits, maintain the integrity of the SD/GD program, and ensure Veterans are receiving dogs of the highest level of quality, and training standards, a dog must be received from an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) accredited service dog organization. VHA Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service administers this benefit program for eligible Veterans through a contracted insurance policy, which includes:

COMPREHENSIVE SD/GD

VETERINARY CARE

Veterans with medically approved guide or service dogs are able to access comprehensive veterinary services for their SD/GD including annual visits for preventive care and maintenance care (e.g., immunizations, dental cleanings, screenings, etc.), as well as urgent/emergent care, prescription medications, and care for chronic illnesses and/or disorders when treatment enables the dog to perform its duties in service to the Veteran. Veterans are not billed for covered services, thereby eliminating need for the Veteran to contact VA for pre-authorization or justify covered charges.

This benefit provides Veterans to access preventive, routine and chronic care for their service dogs/guide dogs on a regular basis. Veterans are able to use any veterinarian as coverage is available in all 50 states, District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.



EQUIPMENT

Service dogs/guide dogs may require specialized equipment that has not been supplied by the organization that provided the Veteran's dog. Wear and tear may also result in the need to replace necessary equipment such as harnesses and leash.

TRAVEL SUPPORT FOR TRAINING THE VETERAN AS A HANDLER

A Veteran obtaining a SD/GD from received from an accredited ADI or IGDF service dog organization is

expected to spend time training with the service dog under the supervision of the organization's qualified trainer to learn important skills prior to independently managing the SD/GD.

The time required varies depending on the skill level and complexity of the tasks the dog and the handler must master. Location also varies, and may include time spent at the service dog training organization and time spent in the Veteran's home and community. VA will provide financial support to enable the Veteran to travel to attend training at the ADI/IGDF site.

This benefit will expand Veterans' options by removing travel costs as a limiting factor in locating and selecting an accredited / certified service dog organization tailored to their needs. This benefit is extended through the Beneficiary travel program and only applies when pre-approved.

For more information visit: www.prosthetics.va.gov/Docs/ServiceDogFAQ.pdf

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SERVICE DOG FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

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

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?

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/>. 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?

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?

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?

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.

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