

Veterinary Health Benefits for Mental Health Mobility Service Dogs

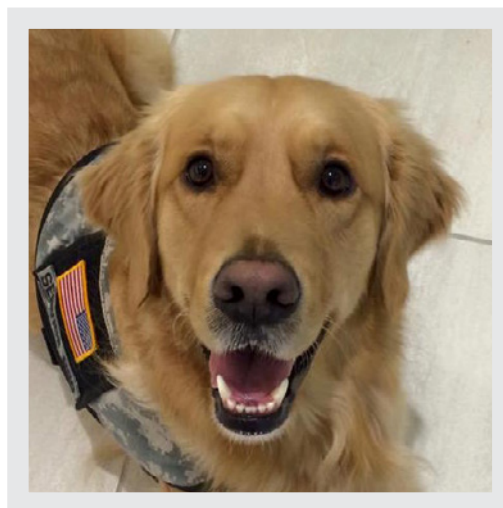
What are service dogs?

Service dogs are specially trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a chronic disability who cannot perform the work or task independently for him or herself. Service dogs can, for example, pick things up, guide people who are blind, alert people who are deaf or pull a wheelchair. They can also remind a person to take prescribed medications and calm a person with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack. It is important to note that service animals are working animals, not pets.

How can service dogs help Veterans with mental health conditions?

Veterans with substantial mobility limitations associated with a mental health disorder for which a service dog has been identified as the optimal way to address the mobility impairment may be eligible for veterinary health benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Mental Health Mobility Service Dog Initiative. A substantial mobility limitation indicates that most common life and work activities (i.e., leaving the house, or getting to medical appointments, using public transportation, etc.) are impaired or prevented for the person more than half the time.

Under the Mental Health Mobility Service Dog Initiative, this benefit has been offered for Veterans with a mental health condition. It provides comprehensive coverage for the canine's health and wellness and any prescription medications necessary to enable the dog to perform its duties in service to the Veteran.



How can a Veteran apply for VA veterinary health benefits?

A Veteran should meet with a VA mental health provider to begin the application process for this 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 apply to

receive the benefit on behalf of the Veteran by contacting the VA [Offices of Mental Health Services](#) and [Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service](#) at VHAPSASClinicalSupportTeam@va.gov.

Each Veteran's case is reviewed and evaluated by a prescribing clinician for the following:

- Goals that are to be accomplished through other assistive technology or therapy
- Goals that are to be accomplished through the use of a service dog
- Ability and means, including potential co-caregivers, to care for the dog currently and in the future

The Veteran will be informed if the veterinary benefit has been granted. Veterans approved for the benefit are then referred to ADI-accredited agencies <https://www.assistedogsinternational.org> to apply for a service dog.

What is covered by the VA veterinary health benefit?

Veterans with working service dogs are provided veterinary care and equipment through VA [Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service](#). VA does not pay for the dog or for boarding, grooming, food or other routine expense associated with owning a dog. Additional information about VA's veterinary health benefits can be found at <http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp>.

In late 2016, the Center for Compassionate Care Innovation partnered with the VA [Offices of Mental Health Services](#) and [Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service](#) to extend eligibility for veterinary health care, specialized equipment and travel support to Veterans with chronic mobility issues associated with a mental health disorder. These benefits help Veterans with some of the costs involved with caring for their service dogs when they receive them from an approved agency accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI).

Additional Resources

- [Assistance Dogs International \(Service Dogs\)](#)
- [International Guide Dog Federation \(Guide Dogs\)](#)