

PATIENT RIGHTS AND ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS

**VA PUGET SOUND
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

**MEMORANDUM RI-014
SEPTEMBER 2023**

ANIMALS BROUGHT INTO VA PUGET SOUND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Service Animals are welcome at VA Puget Sound Health Care System. Pets are not allowed. VHA Directive 1188, Animals on Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Property includes clarification that a service animal can only be a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks to assist a person with a disability. VHA Directive 1188 also states that companion animals, emotional support animals, and pets are not considered service animals and will be denied access to VHA property. Furthermore, VHA Directive 1188, delegates the authority to make determinations regarding access to VA Puget Sound Health Care System for these types of animals to the Director.
2. **POLICY:**
 - a. The policy of VA Puget Sound Health Care System is that Service Animals are welcome; pets and comfort/emotional support animals are not allowed in buildings, in parking lots/garages or on VA grounds. In designated areas of the medical center where the safety or infection control standards do not allow service animals, VA Puget Sound Health Care System staff will assist in meeting the accommodations that the service animal provides. It is the policy of VA Puget Sound Health Care System to comply with the requirements of Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (38 CFR) §1.218(a) (11). It is the policy of VA Puget Sound Health Care System that an individual with a disability requiring the use of a service animal may be accompanied by that animal when accessing the facilities. The owner of a service animal may be asked to remove the service animal from the facility if the service animal creates a disturbance, is not house broken, acts aggressively, or creates a direct threat.
 - b. During flu season and public health situations/emergencies such as a pandemic, usual practices may be amended to reflect infection control safety concerns. If such temporary amendments limit the ability of a Service Animal to accompany its Veteran owner to a specific area of the facility, proper care of a service animal would require an alternate handler take custody and remove the animal from the facility and/or make appropriate arrangements for boarding.
 - c. This policy does not apply to any approved research animals needed or kept on VA property. This policy does not apply to law enforcement agencies that have K9 units.

- d. Family members or visitors of patients in the Community Living Centers (CLC) at the American Lake or Seattle Division may be allowed to bring in pets (please refer to section 4c, Procedures for Personal Pets). Access is strictly limited to those CLCs and pets may not be taken to other areas of the health care system. To be granted access, family members or visitors must gain permission and be given the written requirements of access by the Recreation Therapist for that CLC as part of the Rehabilitation Care Service (RCS) Animal Assisted Program.
- e. At no time is any wild or exotic animals (i.e., non-human primates, reptiles, avian, amphibians, turtles or rodents) allowed inside any of the medical health care facilities.
- f. At no time is any service animal that demonstrates threatening or aggressive behavior allowed inside VA Puget Sound Health Care System.
- g. All owners of service animals brought into the health care system must take appropriate precautions to mitigate allergic responses.
- h. All service animals must demonstrate the temperament and ability to obey basic commands and respond to stress in an appropriate manner.
- i. All service animals must be in a harness, on a leash, or tethered and under control of the handler or alternate handler at all times while on VHA property. If the handler or alternate handler is unable, because of a disability, to use a harness, leash or tether, or the use of such would interfere with the service animal's safety or effective performance of tasks, the handler or alternate handler may use voice control or signals. At no time will any animal brought into the health care system be left unattended.
- j. VA Puget Sound Health Care System employees are covered by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112) and portions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. A VA Puget Sound Health Care System employee, who is a qualified individual with a disability, may request reasonable accommodation regarding his/her employment including a request for use of a service animal on the premises. Such a request will be directed to the employee's supervisor in accordance with the procedures provided in Policy HR-42, Reasonable Accommodation for Employee and Applicants with Disabilities.
- k. A risk assessment by infection prevention department must be conducted prior to approval of any animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy, resident animal program or personal pet visitations, or any other animal program within the facility.

3. DEFINITIONS:

- a. **Service Animal** is defined as any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform specific tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for purposes of this definition. The work or tasks performed by the service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. The crime deterrent effects of an animal's presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort or companionship do not constitute work or tasks for the purposes of this definition. Service dogs in training are not considered service animals. This definition applies regardless of whether VA is providing benefits to support a service dog under 38 CFR §17.148.

NOTE: This definition includes guide dogs and seeing-eye dogs. This definition does not include emotional support, comfort, companion animals, or pets.

- b. **Disability** is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual, a record of such impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment.
- c. **Handler** is an individual with a disability whom the service animal is trained to assist.
- d. **Alternate Handler** is an individual who is responsible for the service animal if the handler is unable to be responsible.
- e. **Direct Threat** is defined as a significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be mitigated or eliminated by reasonably modifying policies, practices or procedures. Examples of direct threats include a service animal barking, growling, snapping, biting, or lunging at someone. The behavior management of the service animal is the responsibility of the handler or alternate handler.
- f. **Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)** is a goal directed interaction with animals and should be documented in the Veteran's medical record as part of their treatment regimen. Animals used in AAT must be up to date with all core vaccinations, and documentation of same must be maintained in the location of the activity area.
- g. **Animal Assisted Activity (AAA)** is casual interaction with animals for pleasure, education, and recreation, and is not goal directed. Animals used in AAA must be up to date with all core vaccinations, and documentation of same must be maintained in the location of the activity area.
- h. **VHA Property** refers to any property owned or leased and under the charge and control of VA.

4. PROCEDURES:

a. SERVICE ANIMALS:

- 1) VA Puget Sound Health Care System staff may ask the individual with a dog the following two questions to determine if the dog is a service animal:
 - a) Is your dog a service animal required because of a disability?
 - b) What work or tasks has your dog been trained to perform?

NOTE: VHA staff CANNOT ask about an individual's disability, CANNOT require medical documentation, CANNOT require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, and CANNOT ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.

- 2) If a service animal is acting in a threatening or disruptive manner, the handler or alternate handler will be directed to remove the service animal from the facility. Animals exhibiting disruptive behavior may be removed from and/or not allowed to return to the facility.
- 3) If a service animal urinates or defecates in a public area within the facility, the handler or alternate handler will be required to clean up after their service animal and directed to remove the service animal from the facility. VA Puget Sound staff will then notify Environmental Management Services (EMS) to clean any area in the facility where waste was removed.
- 4) Service Animal Areas of Access:
 - a) Service animals may accompany their owners/handlers into public food serving and eating areas and any area open to the general public.
 - b) Service animals can accompany their owners using VA Puget Sound Health Care System transportation (campus shuttle, lodging shuttle, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) vans, etc.).
 - c) Hospitalized patients with service animals will be placed in private rooms if possible. If a private room is not available, the patient will be placed with a patient whose exposure to the service animal will not put their healthcare at risk and who is agreeable to sharing the room with the service animal.
 - d) Individuals with a service animal may be allowed to visit hospitalized patients, but the owner/handler should be instructed to avoid direct contact between the service animal and the hospitalized patient.

- e) The Administrative Officer of the Day (AOD) will notify the appropriate Nurse Manager if a patient with a disability and service animal will be admitted.

5) Service Animal Areas of Restriction:

- a) Service animals are not allowed in areas in which masks and gowns are normally worn to reduce the risk of infection and contamination, to include, but not be limited to: Operating Rooms, Marrow Transplant Unit, Oncology, Infectious Disease Units and Rooms, Inpatient Mental Health areas, Sterile Processing, and Pharmacy Sterile Processing areas. Service animals are excluded from special care areas (burn units, intensive care units and other areas containing equipment critical for life support or any area that is “restricted access” with regards to the general public). In addition, animals will not be allowed in the medicine supply room, linen room, food preparation area, or any area where invasive or diagnostic procedures are being performed.
- b) Service animals may accompany patients to all VA Dental Treatment Rooms for examinations, teeth cleaning and non-invasive procedures as long as there is adequate space within the dental treatment room for the service dog, the service dog remains under the control of the handler at all times, and the service dog does not interfere in the safe and effective delivery of dental services to any patient. If the physical space is such that there is not a barrier between the Veteran handler and another Veteran receiving an invasive procedure, the service dog must be contained in totality in the space of the Veteran handler and not interfere in the safe and effective dental care of either Veteran. The service dog is required to be in the presence of an alternate handler during periods where the Veteran handler is receiving oral, IV or nitrous oxide sedation. A service dog will be excluded if it poses an unreasonable risk of harm to any patient or others.
- c) When being scheduled for procedures or services in these restricted areas, patients with service animals will be advised to bring an alternate handler to manage the service animal or to make alternative arrangements for the care and responsibility of the service animal.
- d) Service animals must be removed from the patient care area or facility if, in the opinion of healthcare providers or VA Police, the service animal presents a direct threat to the health or safety of other persons or service animal accommodation requires a fundamental alteration to the nature of the business of providing health care to other patients.

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- (1) Health care providers must differentiate between actual risks posed by a service animal and mere inconvenience or displeasure with the presence of a service animal.
 - (2) Healthcare providers must make services and products available to persons accompanied by service animals without isolating, segregating, or otherwise discriminating against disabled persons with service animals.
 - e) Areas such as the Intensive Care Units, Recovery Rooms, Emergency Department, Urgent Care Unit, and isolation rooms will require assessment of risk on a case-by-case basis by the area manager or supervisor. If possible, a designated examination room will be provided to patients with service animals or an alternate handler will be assigned responsibility for the animal when the patient is in the examination room or similar areas.
 - f) f) The owner/handler will be asked to remove the service animal if it causes a disruption of health care services to other patients or creates a direct threat to patients or staff. The handler is responsible to make arrangements to provide for care and maintenance of the service animal outside of the disrupted patient care area.
 - g) Any person who is substantially adversely affected by a service animal may contact the supervisor in charge of the area to request to be placed in another area.
- 6) Care of Service Animals:
- a) No special housekeeping methods are needed if there is no contamination with animal waste or secretions.
 - b) The owner/handler is responsible for care and behavior management of the service animal. Care of the animal includes, but is not limited to, feeding, watering, and exercising the animal, storage of the animal's food, water and other supplies, and cleanup and disposal of the animal's excrement. This includes maintaining control of the animal at all times.
 - c) Service animal urine or feces must be removed with paper towels and placed in appropriate container (like disposing a diaper) using appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves. Employees will contact housekeeping to assist with disinfecting the area by calling the pager at American Lake (253) 207-2014 or in Seattle (206) 570-0734.
 - d) If the owner/handler is unable to care for the service animal, arrangements must be made to transfer stewardship to an alternate

handler identified by the patient. If the name of an alternate handler is not provided, the patient's primary care staff will first notify the patient's family or other responsible persons to provide the necessary care. If there is no one available to provide care, VA staff may attempt to contact local emergency veterinarians or animal clinics, and arrangements might be made with those external groups to take the animal. The owner/handler will be responsible for any expenses related to this temporary animal placement.

- e) Any person who has handled or touched any animal brought into the medical center will follow standard precautions and use appropriate hand hygiene (washing with soap and water and/or alcohol based hand rub) immediately after touching the animal.

7) Incidents involving animals:

- a) Injuries to a patient, visitor, or employee caused by an animal will be evaluated and treated promptly by a provider. Patients will be evaluated by their primary provider or sent to the Emergency Department at the Seattle Division or Urgent Care Clinic at the American Lake Division. Visitors will be sent to the Emergency Department at the Seattle Division or Urgent Care Clinic at the American Lake Division for immediate evaluation and treatment and referred to their personal provider for follow-up if desired. Employees will be evaluated and treated by the Employee Occupational Health (EOH) staff or the Emergency Department at the Seattle Division or Urgent Care Clinic at the American Lake Division when EOH is closed. VA Police will be notified for appropriate investigation and documentation. The owner of the animal is responsible for the actions of their animals.
- a) If an animal damages property, the owner/handler will be responsible for damages. Any observation of this will immediately be reported to VA Police for appropriate investigation and documentation.

b. **THERAPY ANIMALS:** Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) will be coordinated by the RCS Recreation Therapy Program Manager.

- 1) All common rules as outlined for service animals apply to AAT programs.
- 2) Animals enrolled will be trained with the assistance of or under the direction of individuals who are experienced in AAT programs.
- 3) Animals will be handled by persons trained in providing activities or therapies safely and who know the animals' health status and behavior traits.
- 4) Use of animals that are registered for AAT by national therapy animal organizations is highly recommended to take advantage of standardized

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animal evaluations and screening, handler training, and liability insurance coverage.

- 5) AAT programs will consider appropriate containment of the animal while in the facility to include being under control of its handler at all times.
- 6) Completion of an infection control risk assessment prior to using any animal for an AAT program will be conducted and documented.
- 7) AAT program leader will develop and ensure compliance with cleaning protocols for housekeeping on surfaces utilized by AAT programs.
- 8) All animals used for AAT programs will require an annual health screening and proof of updated vaccinations from their private veterinarian on an annual basis.

c. **PERSONAL PETS:**

- 1) In general, personal pets are not authorized inside facility buildings.
- 2) In the rare event that the benefits of a visitation to a patient is substantial, such as end of life, outweigh the risks, personal pets may be approved.
- 3) The unit's Nurse Manager must complete a risk assessment to ensure protocols are established and notifications made to VA Police of the personal pet arrival. Risk assessment must be conducted that includes immunosuppressed patients' issues and to ensure that pet hygiene meets facility standards and rules and protocols have been explained to the parties involved.
- 4) Personal pets will only be allowed to interact with a patient in a contained room or setting.
- 5) Personal pets and the person handling the pet will be met at the entrance to the facility by a staff member, escorted directly to the area for the visit and then escorted directly out of the facility by health care system staff.
- 6) Time and length of the pets' visit and provisions for the pets' needs will be established prior to visit.
- 7) Clear understanding that if any problems arise concerning the pet, it is to be removed from the health care facility immediately.

5. **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- a. The **Director** has overall responsibility for the administration and enforcement of this policy and has the authority to grant exceptions to it.

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- b. **Service Line Leaders, Managers, Supervisors and Team Leaders** are responsible for ensuring that employees are trained in this policy and these procedures.
- c. VA Puget Sound Health Care System **employees**, when encountering an individual with an animal in the facility, will ask whether the dog is a service animal to determine if the animal is appropriate to be in the facility. If the response is negative, then the employee will direct the person to remove the animal. If the individual does not comply, then the employee will contact the VA Police to assist.
- d. **VA Police Chief** will be responsible for working with staff to enforce this this policy.
- e. The **facility-level champion** is responsible for liaising with VA Central Office (10N), through VISN 20, to address and resolve facility-level issues or problems regarding animal access that cannot be resolved at the facility level.
- f. Rehabilitation Care Services **Animal Assisted Program leader** is responsible for the approval process of all therapy animals, personal pet authorizations, and other exceptions to this policy.

6. REFERENCES:

- a. [Public Law 93-112, \(87 STAT. 355\), Rehabilitation Act, September 26, 1973.](#)
- b. [Public Law 101-336, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, July 26, 1990.](#)
- c. [Title 42 United States Code \(42 U.S.C.\) §12101, Americans with Disabilities Act \(codified\), January 12, 2018.](#)
- d. [VHA Directive 1188, Animals on Veterans Health Administration \(VHA\) Property, August 26, 2015.](#)
- e. [Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA, US Department of Justice - Civil Rights Division - Disability Rights Section, July 20, 2015.](#)
- f. Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Hospitals, The Joint Commission, January 1, 2019.
- g. [Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health Care Facilities, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\), 2003.](#)
- h. [Title 40 United States Code \(40 U.S.C.\) §3103, Admission of guide dogs or other service animals accompanying individuals with disabilities, January 6, 2017.](#)
- i. [Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations \(38 CFR\) §1.218 Security and Law Enforcement at VA facilities, July 1, 2018.](#)
- j. [VHA Directive 1178, Animal-Assisted Activities and Animal-Assisted Therapy, September 14, 2018.](#)

7. RESCISSION: Memorandum RI-14, January 2019

8. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: Patient Experience Manager.

9. RECERTIFICATION DATE: Last business day of September 2028

DocuSigned by:

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9/29/2023

Thomas Bundt, PhD, FACHE
Medical Center Director

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Attachments:

- A. Frequently Asked Questions – Service Animals on VA Property – August 2015
- B. Animal Access to VA Property (Power Point Presentation) April 13, 2015
- C. Guidance for Veterans and Staff on Service Animals

Employee FAQs related to service animal access on VHA property

These FAQs are intended to provide guidance to VA employees regarding Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (38 CFR) §1.218(a) (11) and VHA Directive 1188, and to answer questions related to: (1) How to know if an animal is a service animal that may access VHA property; (2) Where a service animal can go on VHA property; (3) What behavior on the part of a service animal warrants its removal from VHA property; and (4) What to do if a service animal needs to be removed from VHA property.

I. HOW TO KNOW IF AN ANIMAL IS A SERVICE ANIMAL THAT MAY ACCESS VHA PROPERTY.

Under VA regulation and VHA policy, a service animal can only be a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks to assist a person with a disability. Please use the following FAQs as additional guidance to determine whether an animal is a service animal, and contact your facility-level champion on animal access issues if you need further assistance.

Q: To what property does the VA regulation and VHA policy apply?

A: The VA regulation and VHA policy applies to any property owned or leased by VA and under the charge and control of VA. For VHA purposes, this includes VA Medical Centers, VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), Vet Centers, and any office space for VHA staff that is provided by VA.

Q: Can an animal that is not a dog be considered a service animal?

A: No, only a dog that is trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability is considered a service animal.

Q: How can I tell if a dog is a service animal that is trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability?

A: Sometimes it is obvious that the dog is a service animal, such as with a guide dog (also known as a seeing-eye dog). Other times, you may need to ask the person with the dog the following two questions to determine whether the dog is a service animal:

1. Is your dog a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or tasks has your dog been trained to perform?

You can only ask the two questions above to determine whether an animal is a service animal. When you need to ask the two questions above, please use this additional guidance to determine if a dog is a service animal:

1. Is your dog a service animal required because of a disability?
 - If the person responds “yes,” then you take them at their word. You cannot ask what the person’s disability is, you cannot ask for medical documentation of the disability, and you cannot ask for or require an identification card or training documentation for the dog.

- If the person responds “no,” then the dog is not permitted to access VHA property.
 - Dogs whose sole function is to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship are not service animals. If the person says that the dog is their “companion animal” or “emotional support animal,” then the dog is not a service animal and is not permitted to access VHA property under VA regulation.
 - If you are unsure whether an answer to question 1 is adequate, please contact the designated facility-level champion for animal access issues.
2. What work or task has your dog been trained to perform?
- The work or task that the dog has been trained to perform must be directly related to the person’s disability. Examples of such work or tasks include but are not limited to:
 - Guiding people who are blind or have low vision.
 - Alerting people who are deaf or have hearing impairment.
 - Alerting and protecting someone who is having a seizure.
 - Reminding a person with a mental illness to take prescribed medications.
 - Calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack.
 - Retrieving items for a person who uses a wheelchair.
 - Providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability for a person with mobility impairments.
 - You cannot ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.
 - Dogs whose sole function is to provide **emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship** are **not service animals**. If the person with the dog states that the dog only provides emotional support or companionship, then the dog is not a service animal and is not permitted to access VHA property.
 - If you are unsure whether an answer to question 2 is adequate, please contact the designated facility-level champion for animal access issues.

Q: Doesn’t VA have to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

A: As a Federal executive agency, VA is not subject to the ADA; however, VA regulation and policy generally model the same criteria that are in the regulations that implement the ADA in terms of service animal access. **These ADA regulations do not permit emotional support animals or comfort animals to access public property.**

Q: Are dogs that are trained to assist an individual with PTSD (PTSD dogs) allowed to access VHA property?

A: Yes, service dogs trained to assist someone disabled by PTSD are considered service animals and are permitted to access VHA property. However, PTSD dogs are

not eligible under VA regulation for VHA service dog benefits. See 38 CFR 17.148 for more information regarding the clinical requirements for service dog benefits.

Q: Doesn't 38 U.S.C. 901 (Public Law 112-154) limit service animal access in VA to only those dogs whose trainings is "accredited?" Why can't I ask to see proof of a dog's "accredited" training as a service animal?

A: Under 38 U.S.C. 901 (Public Law 112-154), VA shall not prohibit the use of a service dog on VA property if that dog is trained by an "accredited" organization. However, this law does not prevent VA from allowing access to a broader group of service animals. VA interprets Public Law 112-154 in VA regulation (38 CFR 1.218(a) (11)) to allow access for any service animal, regardless of where, how, or by whom the animal was trained. **You may not ask to see proof of a dog's training as a service animal.**

Q: If a person without being asked presents proof of a dog's "accredited" training, am I required to permit access of the dog under 38 U.S.C. 901 (Public Law 112-154)?

A: No. When it is not obvious that a dog is a service animal, the way to determine whether the dog is a service animal is to ask the two questions discussed above (1. Is your dog a service animal required because of a disability?; 2. What work or tasks has your dog been trained to perform?). Whether the dog is a service animal will be determined based on the answers to these questions. Thus, the presentation of proof of a dog's "accredited" training by a person is not an automatic way to gain access. Also, as explained above, a dog need not be trained by an "accredited" organization to be a service dog.

Q: Can a VHA employee bring his or her service animal to work?

A: If a VHA employee requires a service animal while at work, he or she must contact the local Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator to process the request for the service animal.

II. WHERE A SERVICE ANIMAL CAN GO ON VHA PROPERTY

Under VA regulation and VHA policy, a service animal can accompany the person with the disability to access VHA property that the general public can access, subject to the same terms and conditions as the general public, and where the presence of a service animal would not compromise patient care, patient safety, or infection prevention and control standards. There are certain areas on VHA property, however, that a service animal may not access (see 38 CFR 1.218(a) (11) and VHA Directive 1188). Please use the following FAQs as additional guidance to determine whether a service animal can access certain areas of VA property, and contact your facility-level champion on animal access issues if you need further assistance.

Q: Can a service animal be in the **emergency room**?

A: **Yes**, if the person with the disability (handler) or an alternate handler can control the service animal on a harness, leash, tether, or using voice or other control, and the presence of a service animal would not compromise patient care, patient safety, or infection prevention and control standards.

Q: Can a service animal accompany the handler or alternate handler into **examination rooms**?

A: **Yes**, if the handler or alternate handler can control the service animal on a harness, leash, tether, or using voice or other control, and the presence of a service animal would not compromise patient care, patient safety, or infection prevention and control standards.

Q: What if other individuals in a waiting room or open area fear dogs or allergic to dogs, can the service animal stay in these areas anyway?

A: **Other people's fear of dogs or allergies to dogs is not a reason for a service animal to leave a part of VHA property.** When a person who is allergic to dog dander or fearful of dogs and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations within the room or different rooms in the facility. A service animal can be removed from an area if the animal poses a risk to patient safety or health.

Q: Can a service animal stay overnight with the handler in a hospital room?

A: Many VHA hospital rooms are considered acute inpatient areas—under VA regulation and VHA policy, the presence of the service animal in such an area, overnight or even for a shorter duration, must be approved by the handler's treating providers and be documented as part of the handler's treatment plan. If this is done, then the service animal may stay with the handler in these areas—however, the handler or alternate handler (e.g. family member) must be responsible for the control of the service animal and care of the service animal at all times, VHA will not be responsible for the service animal.

Q: What if the handler is sharing a hospital room with someone who fears dogs or is allergic to dogs, can the dog stay with the handler anyway?

A: Other people's fear of dogs or allergies to dogs is not a reason for a service animal to leave a part of VHA property. When a person who is allergic to dog dander or fearful of dogs and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations within the room or different rooms in the facility. A service animal can be removed from an area if the animal poses a risk to patient safety or health.

III. REASONS TO HAVE A SERVICE ANIMAL REMOVED FROM VHA PROPERTY

Under VA regulation and VHA policy, a service animal will be removed from VHA property if it is not under the control of the handler or alternate handler, if it is not housebroken, if it behaves in an aggressive way (e.g. by snapping, biting, growling, baring its teeth, or lunging), or if it exhibits external signs of parasites, disease, or bad health (see 38 CFR 1.218(a) (11) and VHA Directive 1188). Please use the following FAQs as additional guidance to determine whether a service animal must be removed from VHA property, and contact your facility-level champion on animal access issues if you need further assistance.

Q: What do we do when a handler that is on VHA property with a service animal needs emergency treatment or must be admitted to a VHA inpatient setting?

A: Under VA regulation and VHA policy, a service animal must be under the control of a handler or alternate handler at all times, and VA is not responsible for the service animal while it is on VA property. It is recommended that signage be visible that VHA staff cannot care for service animals and that urges handlers to have an alternate handler's contact information readily available if the handler becomes unable to control the service animal while on VHA property.

NOTE: Veterans and other members of the public have been encouraged through internet resources and other messaging to have an alternate handler's contact information available if the service animal needs to be removed.

Q: What if an alternate handler is not able to take control of the service animal from the handler that needs emergency treatment or needs to be admitted? Can VHA staff look after the dog or take it to a kennel or boarding facility in this instance?

A: VHA staff cannot take control of the service animal, cannot take the service animal to a kennel or boarding facility, and cannot attempt to board the service animal themselves on VHA property. If an alternate handler is not identified or cannot be reached by the handler, VHA staff should attempt to contact the individual that the handler has identified as their emergency contact to remove the service animal from VHA property. If individual facilities are concerned that this will be a recurring situation, those facilities can also direct staff to have contact numbers available for local emergency veterinarians or animal clinics, and arrangements might be made with those external groups to take the animal.

Q: What if a service animal gets sick on VHA property and needs to be removed from the property, but the handler does not want to miss their appointment and is unable to get an alternate handler to take the service animal? Can VHA staff take control of the animal in this instance?

A: Please reference the answers above related to VHA staff not taking control of the service animal. ***NOTE: Veterans and other members of the public have been encouraged through internet resources and other messaging to have an alternate handler's contact information available if the service animal needs to be removed.***

Q: What do we do if a service animal bites or otherwise injures a person or another service animal on VHA property?

A: VHA staff who witness or who are otherwise involved with an injury caused by a service animal should follow their facility's emergency and/or incident reporting procedures to ensure proper notification of and follow up by appropriate facility staff. This includes directing the individual that experienced the injury to the VHA emergency room or urgent care location to be seen and treated by a provider as authorized (either as care to an eligible patient or under humanitarian authority), and contacting the servicing VA Police unit or local law enforcement if needed and as appropriate to the facility. If the injured individual is a VA employee, a referral must also be made to the facility's Occupational Health department. VHA staff should request that the handler provide information related to the service animal's health records (particularly proof of current rabies vaccination) if the service animal causes an injury. All information regarding such an incident must be documented on a VA Report of Contact form and the resulting VA Police Investigation Report, if any.

Q: What do we do if a service animal displays other aggressive behavior on VHA property?

A: VHA staff who witness aggressive behavior by a service animal should follow their facility's emergency reporting procedures to ensure proper notification of and follow up by appropriate facility staff. VHA staff should request that the handler provide information related to the service animal's health records if the service animal causes an injury. All information regarding such an incident must be documented on a VA Report of Contact form and the resulting VA Police Investigation Report, if any.

IV. HOW TO REMOVE A SERVICE ANIMAL FROM VHA PROPERTY

Under VA regulation and VHA policy, a service animal will be removed from VHA property if it is not under the control of the handler or alternate handler, if it is not housebroken, or if it behaves in an aggressive way (e.g. by snapping, biting, growling, baring its teeth, or lunging), or exhibits external signs of disease or bad health (see 38 CFR 1.218(a) (11) and VHA Directive 1188). The following are basic procedures for each VHA facility to follow to ensure that if a service animal needs to be removed, that such removal is only undertaken by individuals who are not VHA staff, or that such removal is only initiated by VA Police Officers in VHA facilities if absolutely needed. If a service animal needs to be removed from VHA property, please follow the steps below.

NOTE: If the service animal has caused an injury, or behaves in an aggressive way to necessitate its immediate removal but is not removed by the handler or alternate handler, please follow your facility's emergency reporting procedures and proceed to step 5 below.

1. VHA staff must alert the handler that due to one of the removal reasons in VA regulation (see 38 CFR 1.218(a) (11) and VHA Directive 1188), it is not safe for the service animal to remain on VHA property.

2. VHA staff must then offer the medical or other services to the handler (that the handler was present on VHA property to receive) without the service animal being present on VHA property.

3. If the handler agrees to receive services without the service animal present, VHA staff will direct the handler to remove the service animal from VHA property, or to contact an alternate handler or make other arrangements to have the service animal removed from VHA property. The handler must be reminded that VHA staff cannot care for a service animal and that the safety and care of the service animal is the responsibility of the handler.

- a. If the handler is able to remove the service animal from VHA property themselves or arrange to have the service animal removed, VHA staff will attempt to provide the services to the handler within the same or a similar timeframe as originally scheduled.
- b. If the handler cannot remove the service animal from VHA property themselves and cannot contact an alternate handler to remove the dog (if the handler does not have a cell phone, for instance), VHA staff can assist to contact an alternate handler that is identified by the handler.
- c. If the identified alternate handler cannot be contacted by either the handler or VHA staff, VHA staff can provide to the handler contact information for a local veterinarian, kennel/boarding facility, or an animal clinic if the VHA staff has such contact information.
- d. If the handler is or becomes incapacitated and cannot identify an alternate handler to remove the service animal, VHA staff should attempt to contact the handler's emergency contact. VHA staff can provide to the emergency contact the contact information for a local veterinarian, kennel/boarding facility, or an animal clinic if VHA staff has such information.

4. If the handler does not want to receive services without the service animal being present, VHA staff should direct the handler to leave VHA property with the service animal. VHA staff will attempt to reschedule the services at another time.

5. If the handler does not want to receive services without the presence of the service animal and also refuses to leave VHA property with the service animal, or otherwise does not make arrangements to have the service animal removed, VA Police Officers should be called for assistance.

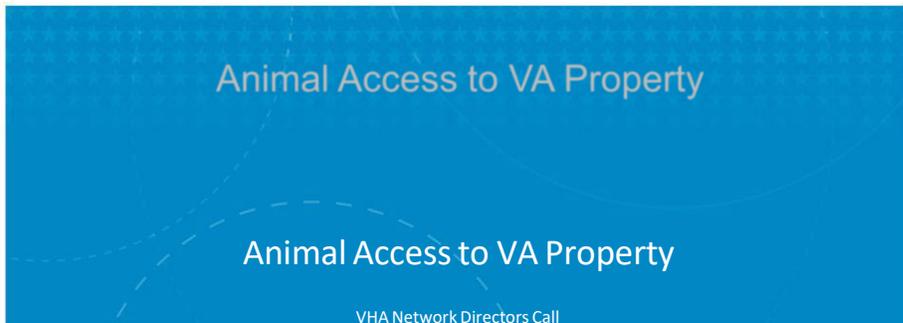
6. The VA Police Officer would seek voluntary compliance and would ask the handler or alternate handler to remove the animal from VHA property. If the handler or alternate handler refuses, the VA Police Officer would then order the handler or alternate handler to remove the animal from VHA property, under penalty of 38 CFR 1.218(b), Schedule of Offenses and Penalties. Example offenses from § 1.218(b) include: (6) Failure to comply with signs of a directive and restrictive nature posted for safety purposes. [This option requires the display of appropriate signage]; (11) Disorderly conduct which creates loud, boisterous, and unusual noise, or which

obstructs the normal use of entrances, exits, foyers, offices, corridors, elevators, and stairways or which tends to impede or prevent the normal operation of a service or operation of the facility; and/or (12) Failure to depart premises by unauthorized persons.

7. If the handler or alternate handler continues to refuse to comply with the lawful instructions of a VA Police Officer then the officer may take enforcement action in the form of the issuance of a United States District Court Violation Notice (USDCVN) and/or physical arrest of the handler or alternate handler. If physical arrest is required, an officer will first secure the animal (i.e. tethered securely, placed into a temporary dog carrier or box, and/or placed inside a holding room) and contact local animal control for the removal of the animal from Department controlled property. ***NOTE: Each situation must be judged on its own merits and the VA Police Officer's goal is voluntary compliance.***

8. Authorization to issue the USDCVN is limited to duly appointed VA Police Officers acting within comprehensive instructions of the court and the VHA facility director. VA Police Chiefs are encouraged to work with their local VA Regional Counsel and Assistant United States Attorney in determining which VA Regulation and/or depending on jurisdiction, state offense classification best addresses any violation.

Animal Access to VA Property



NOTE: double click on picture above to open presentation.

Policy & Guidance for Veterans & Staff on Service Animals

- 1) Pets are not permitted on premises of VA Puget Sound.
- 2) Verifiable Service Animals (dogs only) are permitted to assist Veterans with disabilities.
- 3) The only service dogs recognized by VA include:
 - a. Mobility dogs (for transfers, opening doors and mobility assistance)
 - b. Seizure alert dogs
 - c. Seeing eye dogs
 - d. Hearing dogs
 - e. PTSD dogs (for protection barrier, anxiety or sleep management)
- 4) Dogs whose sole function is to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort or companionship are not considered service animals by VHA and are not permitted access per VA regulation.
- 5) Service animals are not allowed in the following areas: operating rooms, marrow transplant unit, oncology, and inpatient mental health. Service animals may also be denied entry in areas with identified infection control restrictions (e.g., oncology ward).
- 6) The owner/handler or alternate is responsible for control or care of the service animal at all times.
- 7) VA is not responsible for the service animal while it is on VA property.
- 8) If the service animal presents a threat to the health or safety of other persons, the service animals must be removed from the facility and not allowed to return.
- 9) The owner/handler or alternate will be asked to remove the service animal from the facility if it causes a disruption of health care services or is a threat to patients or staff. Examples of disruptive behavior include: an animal relieving itself inside a building, barking, growling, biting or lunging.
- 10) The owner/handler should be prepared to share contact information for an alternate handler/emergency contact for care of their service animal in the event they are unable to care for their service animal. If an alternate handler is not available and the Veteran will need care in a restricted area:
 - a. The Veteran will be provided alternative care options, or
 - b. The Veteran may opt to not receive treatment, or
 - c. Alternative arrangements may be required to care for the service animal at a kennel or shelter for animals. Expenses for this care will be the responsibility of the owner/handler.

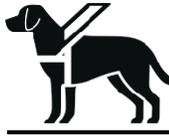
- 11) Staff are permitted to ask and Veterans must be able to respond to 2 questions:
 - a. What is the purpose of the service animal?
 - b. What tasks is their service animal trained to perform?

- 12) Staff are not permitted to care for service animals or pets for any Veteran. Staff cannot take control of the service animal, cannot take the service animal to a kennel or boarding facility, and cannot attempt to board the service animal themselves on or off VHA property.

- 13) Questions related to this guidance and policy *RI-014 Animals Brought into VA Puget Sound Health Care System* should be directed to the facility level workgroup: PugServiceAnimal@va.gov.

- 14) **Concerns regarding the behavior of a service animal and/or handler, will be reported to VA Police**, and through the Joint Patient Safety Reporting System (JPSR).

No Pets Allowed at VA Puget Sound Health Care System Service Animals Permitted (dogs only)



Report any unsafe behaviors with any animals to VA Police Dispatch at ext. 62899 or

Direct line: 206-746-2899