

## SERVICE DOGS

- The Government recognized that there was great interest in using service dogs to assist Veterans with mental health conditions.
- As research in this area was limited, Veterans Affairs Canada funded a small pilot study in 2018 to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of using service dogs to assist Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The study was completed in 2018 with limited results.
- In 2019, Wounded Warriors Canada received funding for a project through the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund to expand its Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Service Dog Program and ensure that PTSD Service Dogs meet or exceed the published standards available in Canada.
- Veterans Affairs Canada continues to monitor additional studies related to service dogs currently being conducted by our allies.
- As a result of a Budget 2018 initiative, individuals who rely on a specially trained service animal to assist in coping with their mental health condition may qualify for Canada Revenue Agency's Medical Expense Tax Credit effective January 2018.

## **BACKGROUND – Service Dogs**

### **2018 Expansion of the Medical Expense Tax Credit for Psychiatric Service Dogs:**

Through Budget 2018, the Government expanded the Medical Expense Tax Credit to recognize costs for these animals for the 2018 and future tax years. This measure directly benefits Veterans and others in the disability community who rely on mental health service dogs.

### **Standards:**

Veterans Affairs Canada previously had a contract with the Canadian General Standards Board to establish a set of national standards to provide assurance that the service dogs being provided to Veterans are properly trained and meet standardized behavior requirements. On April 17, 2018, the Canadian General Standards Board notified members of the technical committee that it had withdrawn its intent to produce a National Standard of Canada for Service Dogs, as there was no consensus among the committee members that the standard could be achieved. As a result, the initiative to develop a national standard was discontinued.

### **Pilot Study:**

As research in this area was limited, Veterans Affairs Canada funded a pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of service dogs for Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. While 31 Veterans were recruited, only 18 Veteran participants completed the pilot study over the course of an 18-month period.

The pilot study is complete and the final report was received on July 31, 2018. Results of the study revealed that Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder who had a service dog for 12 months:

- had slightly increased their physical activity and reported fewer nightmares and improved sleep quality;
- had a reduction in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms and a moderate, long-lasting reduction in depressive symptoms;
- reported significant increases in the quality of life domains, in venturing into their communities and feeling more comfortable in public places;
- had no reduced medication use or reliance on a family member/other caregiver.

Veterans Affairs Canada continues to monitor additional studies related to service dogs currently being conducted by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the Australian Department of Veterans Affairs.