SERVICE DOGS

- The Government recognizes that there is great interest in using service dogs to assist Veterans with physical and mental health conditions.

- In June 2022 the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) released its report “Incorporating Service Dogs into the Rehabilitation Program of Veterans Affairs Canada”. Amongst ACVA’s 6 recommendations, Veteran’s Affairs Canada (VAC) was asked to take into consideration the work underway in a five-year pilot program by the United States Veterans Administration (USVA).

- The Department continues to review and monitor emerging research and evidence with respect to the use of service dogs, including any future change in policy direction by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Our goal is to make sure that Veterans are covered for the mental and physical health support they need.
When Pressed:

**Q1 – What has the Government done to support mental health service dogs for Veterans?**

In 2015, the Department funded a pilot study to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of using service dogs to assist Veterans with PTSD. The findings helped inform the Budget 2018 expansion of the Medical Expense Tax Credit to recognize mental health service dogs. In 2019, through the Veteran Family and Well-being Fund, Wounded Warriors Canada received funding to expand its PTSD service dog program and ensure that their service dogs meet or exceed any published standards available in Canada.

In 2015, Veterans Affairs Canada contracted the Canadian General Standards Board to establish a set of national standards; this initiative was later discontinued as consensus amongst the group was not possible. At present, the Department is engaged with those involved in the development of a national standard for assistance animals along with other interested parties.

**Q2 – What support does the Department provide today for Veterans with service dogs?**

Currently, Veterans Affairs Canada does not provide support for service dogs.

**Q3 – Will Veterans Affairs Canada support the use of service dogs for PTSD and mental health?**

The Department is aware of the interest in psychiatric service dogs and the potential they may have to assist those suffering from PTSD or other mental health conditions. While this is so, the Department must operate in the best interests of each client when approving the right benefit at the right time. Our goal is to provide the best possible coverage to eligible veterans to meet their health needs with evidence-based, safe and effective health benefits. Currently, there is insufficient evidence to support their efficacy as a treatment or an aid.

Veterans Affairs Canada continues to review and monitor the approach it is taking with mental health service dogs. The Department is always looking at ways to improve its support for Veterans based on evidence, while ensuring the health and safety of Veterans.

**Q4 – The US Department of Veterans Affairs has undertaken a pilot program for training service dogs by Veterans with PTSD. Is the Government willing to support a similar program for Veterans in Canada?**

Veterans Affairs Canada has consulted with the United States Veterans Affairs about their research and policy direction, to inform what may be done in Canada and within the Canadian context. VAC is constantly reviewing emerging studies and research to...
determine its approach with mental health service dogs, including any future change in policy direction by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.
BACKGROUND — SERVICE DOGS

The Government of Canada expanded the Medical Expense Tax Credit to recognize specially trained service animals to assist individuals in coping with their mental health condition. Effective January 2018, this measure directly benefits Veterans and others in the disability community who rely on service dogs including mental health service dogs.

Veterans Affairs Canada:
Veterans Affairs Canada previously funded a pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of service dogs for Veterans with PTSD. While 31 Veterans were recruited, only 18 Veteran participants completed the pilot study over the course of an 18-month period. In 2018 the study was released with limited findings.

United States Veterans Affairs:
Veterans Affairs Canada is interested in the United States PAWS pilot (Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers) announced in August 2021 and approved and funded by Congress. The pilot program began in late Summer 2022 and is being conducted over a 5-year period in five VA medical centre sites. USVA has put together a service dog training model, which will have Veterans engage in both basic obedience and other training of a dog, so that the dog may become a service dog for another individual. Participation in the training is anticipated to improve the Veteran’s self-efficacy and increase their sense of purpose and self-worth.

Australia’s Rehabilitation Appliances Program:
While Australia’s Department of Veterans Affairs began a 4-year study of service dogs and Veterans with PTSD in 2019, it decided not to wait for the results. In 2022, DVA Australia began providing service dogs to carefully screened Veterans with PTSD under its Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program to help meet their clinical recovery goals. VAC will monitor with interest the results of the Australia study and DVA Australia’s newly adopted practice to provide psychiatric service dogs to eligible Veterans with PTSD.

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:
In June 2022, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA) tabled its report “Incorporating Service Dogs Into the Rehabilitation Program of Veterans Affairs Canada (publications.gc.ca)”. Six recommendations request the involvement of VAC or the Government of Canada.