

March 10, 2011

GUIDE DOGS AND SERVICE DOGS ON VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA) PROPERTY

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes policy regarding Veterans and members of the public who enter VHA facilities and properties accompanied by guide dogs (also known as seeing-eye dogs) and other service dogs. **NOTE:** *This Directive only addresses guide dogs and other service dogs accessing VHA facilities and properties when acting in their capacity as a service animal performing guide and service duties for a disabled individual.*

2. BACKGROUND

a. Trained guide dogs and other trained service dogs can have a significant role in maintaining functionality and promoting maximal independence of individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are authorized to enter VHA facilities and property accompanied by their trained guide dog or trained service dog consistent with the same terms and conditions, and subject to the same regulations that govern the admission of the general public to the property.

b. Therapy animals, companion animals, emotional support animals, and pets are not considered service animals, and their access to VHA facilities and properties are not covered by this Directive.

c. Definitions

(1) **Disability.** A 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 an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.

(2) **Guide Dog.** A guide dog (also known as seeing-eye dogs) is a type of service animal that recognizes and avoids any obstacle that would harm the handler, keeps the handler on a straight route, and is able to selectively disobey commands that would lead to the handler's harm (e.g., crossing the street in the path of an on-coming car).

(3) **Service Dog.** A service dog is one that is specially trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability who cannot perform the work or task independent of the dog. The work or tasks performed by the service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability, and the service provided by the dog must compensate or offset the disability that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual. **NOTE:** *This does not include service dogs in training.*

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy to permit guide dogs (seeing-eye dogs) and other service dogs to accompany individuals with a disability to all areas of a VHA facility and property on the same

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terms and conditions, and subject to the same regulations, as generally govern the admission of the public to the property while maintaining a safe environment for patients, employees, visitors, and the service dog.

4. ACTION

a. **The Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS).** The Chief Officer, RCS, is responsible for ensuring all RCS Vet Center staff are aware of, and comply with, this Directive.

b. **Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) Director.** Each VISN Director is responsible for ensuring that VISN facilities have a written policy on guide dogs and service dogs that conforms to this Directive no later than June 30, 2011.

c. **Facility Director.** Each Facility Director, or designee, in accordance with Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 1.218(a) (11), has the authority to make determinations regarding the entry of dogs into VHA facilities or on VHA property. The Facility Director is responsible for ensuring, that no later than June 30, 2011, there is a written published policy that directly and specifically addresses trained guide dogs and service dogs accompanying individuals with disabilities entering VHA facilities. This policy is to include, but is not limited to:

(1) The dog is not permitted to run free or roam in VHA buildings or on VHA property.

(2) The dog must be in a guiding harness, or on a leash, and under control at all times while in VHA buildings or on VHA property.

5. REFERENCES

a. Title 40 United States Code 3103.

b. Title 38 CFR 1.218.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Chief Officer, Patient Care Services (11) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions are referred to (202) 461-7590.

7. RESCISSIONS: None. This Directive expires March 31, 2016.

Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

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