

# Veterinary Care Considerations for Service Dogs

September 7, 2023

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## > Agenda

1. What is (and what is not) a service dog
2. Expectations for service dog behavior
3. Considerations for working with service dog handlers
4. Providing veterinary care for service dogs
5. Airline Travel with a service dog
6. Supporting a handler through retirement or pet loss



## > Our Mission



Canine Companions places expertly trained service dogs and provides a lifetime of follow-up services for people with disabilities, entirely free of charge.



## > Who We Serve



### CHILDREN

- Assist with physical tasks
- Provide deep calming pressure
- Interrupt or redirect a behavior



### ADULTS

- Pick up dropped items
- Help propel a manual wheelchair
- Alert d/Deaf or hard of hearing handlers to important sounds



### VETERANS

- Create space in crowded environments
- Interrupt nightmares or night terrors
- Assist with physical tasks



### PROFESSIONALS

- Assist in health facilities with rehabilitation goals
- Assist students in special education classrooms
- Work in criminal justice supporting victims of abuse and/or violence

## > WHAT IS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

- Service animals are working animals, not pets.
- The work or *task* a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability.
- Limited to dogs and miniature horses
- This definition applies in places of public accommodation.



## > What is a service dog?

### SERVICE DOGS

**Service dogs are trained in specific tasks to assist a person with a disability.**

- > Allowed anywhere their handlers are permitted, like a movie theater, hospital or restaurant
- > Highly trained and socialized to be safe in public



## > What is NOT a service dog?

### FACILITY DOGS

**Facility dogs are trained in specific tasks to work alongside professionals.**

- > Clients include those in a healthcare, visitation or educational setting. Their skills help improve client outcomes
- > Allowed in the handler's workplace, but not in other public places



> What is NOT a service dog?

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS

**Emotional support animals provide comfort to people with mental health conditions.**

- > Pets that are allowed in housing, even if the property has a no-pet policy
- > Not allowed in public places

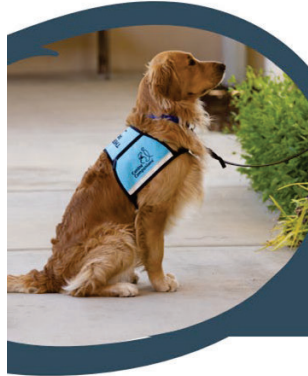


> What is NOT a service dog?

## THERAPY DOGS

**Therapy dogs are certified pet dogs that provide comfort to many people.**

- > Provide comfort to people in libraries, schools or other settings
- > Only wear vests during approved visits and not allowed in public places



> What is NOT a service dog?

## FUTURE SERVICE DOGS

**Future service dogs are learning to assist a person with a disability.**

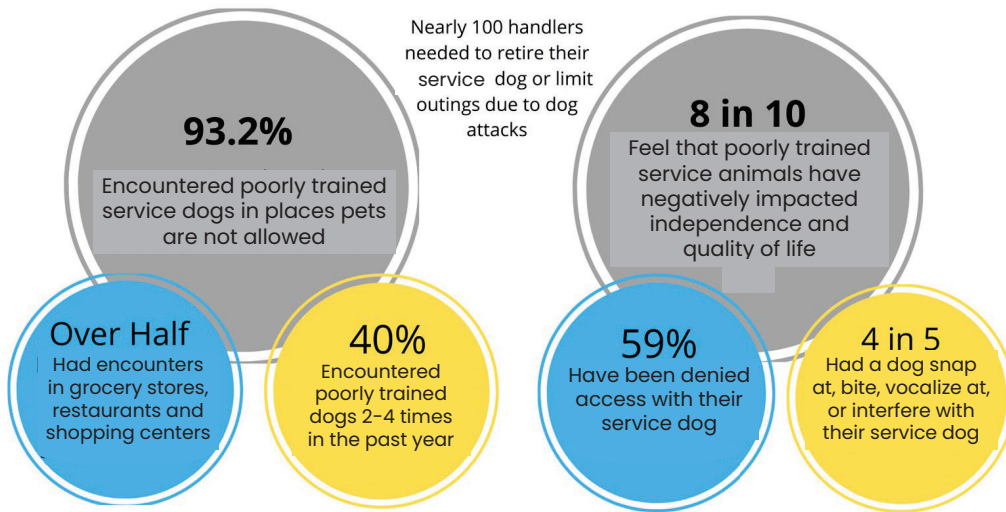
- > Public access laws for future service dogs vary by state. Canine Companions puppies rely on the goodwill of businesses to help prepare them for their jobs



What is NOT a service dog?

A Fraudulent Service Dog





## > EXAMPLES OF SERVICE DOG TASKS

- Retrieving dropped cell phone
- Alerting to sounds in the environment
- Guiding a person who is blind or visually impaired
- Pulling a manual wheelchair
- Providing deep pressure and physical support after seizure
- Creating a physical barrier between handler with PTSD and other people
- Interrupting anxiety behaviors
- Alerting to changes in blood sugar



## > Expectations for a service dog team

- A single bark or a handful of very intentional barks may be a task to:
  - Call for help
  - Alert to a medical episode
- The key is the dog's behavior in general.
  - Not barking like the mail carrier is here!



## > Service Dog Stereotypes

- Breed or size of a service dog doesn't matter as long as it is performing tasks to assist with a disability.
  - e.g. Yorkie alerting to blood sugar changes
  - e.g Great Danes for balance work
- Emotional support animals are pets (usually dogs or cats), and just like our pets, they come in different shapes, sizes and even species!



## > A Service Dog Is More Than A Vest

### **There are no credentialing or federal registries for service dogs**

A large number of companies exist that provide “documentation,” “ID Cards,” and a “registration” with the purchase of a vest

Owner-trained service dogs have a right to be in public if they meet the same standards of behavior.



## > Behavioral Guidelines

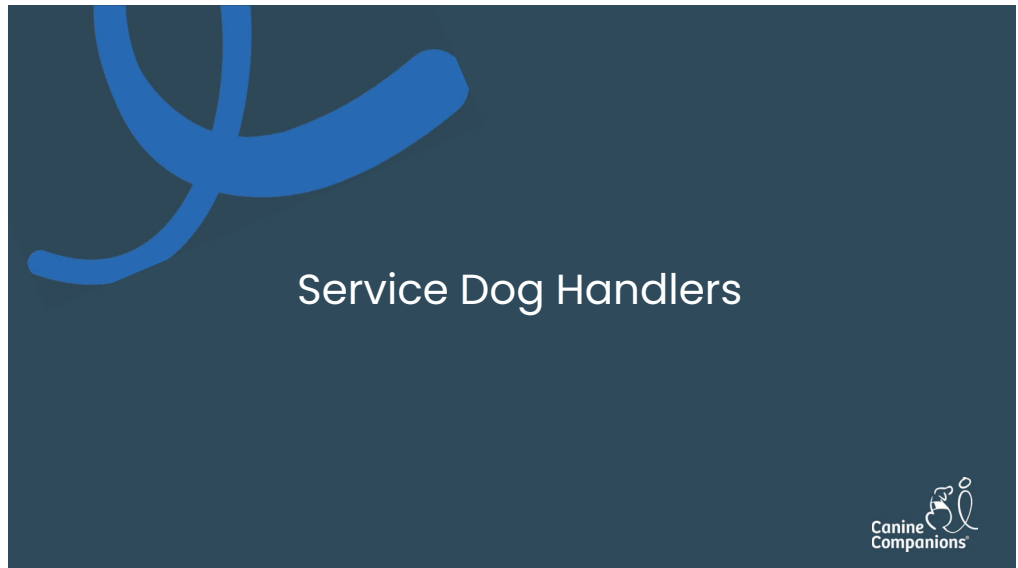
What behaviors are not acceptable for a service dog?

- Aggression—Biting, snarling, growling, lunging, snapping
- Uncontrolled barking
- Eating off tables or floors
- Interfering with other customers
  - Begging, jumping, lunging, aggression
- Repeated toileting accidents



### **Why it Matters**

When untrained dogs and pets posing as service animals behave badly, people who rely on service dogs pay a steep price — added discrimination and denied access to public places — both violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



## Service Dog Handlers

## > What can you ask a person with a service dog?

In your place of business, you can only ask two questions (when the individual's need and tasks performed by the animal are not obvious):

1. "Is the dog a service animal **required because of a disability?**"
2. "What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?"

If service dog is misbehaving and the handler does not effectively get the dog under control, OR showing aggressive behavior, the business may ask that the dog be removed from the premises.

## > What CAN'T you ask?

You can't ask what kind of disability a person has, whether it's visible or not.

You also can't ask to see the task the dog is trained to perform.

You can't ask for "papers," credentials or ID cards.



## Not All Disabilities Are Visible

Epilepsy  
Psychiatric disabilities  
Post-traumatic stress disorder  
Diabetes  
Deaf/hard of hearing  
Chronic fatigue syndrome  
Learning disabilities or sensory disability  
Autism

## > Working with the service dog handler

- Introduce yourself and talk to the handler, rather than through someone else who may have accompanied the service dog team.
- Assume a service dog is working, even if their vest/harness is off. Ask permission before removing equipment.
- Try to keep the dog and handler together as much as possible.
- Don't feed a service dog without permission.
- Ask the handler for assistance to get the dog to follow instructions.



## Veterinary Care for Service Dogs



### > Health and Behavior Screening

Can vary based on where the dog was acquired and trained

- Owner trained vs. trained by an organization
- Organizations that are members of Assistance Dogs International (ADI) must meet standards

### > Canine Companions Health Screening

**Orthopedic:**

**Hips – OFA an PennHIP  
Elbows: OFA**

**Vet Specialists:**

**Cardiologist (auscultation +/- echo)  
Ophthalmologist**

**Genetic Screening: Breeder dogs screened for genetic diseases**

**Comprehensive Laboratory Screening**

## > Canine Companions Behavior Evaluations

- **C-BARQ: 6 and 12 months of age**
- **Monthly reports from puppy raisers**
- **In For Training screening (temperament test)**
- **Additional training evaluations**

## > Healthcare Recommendations for Service Dogs

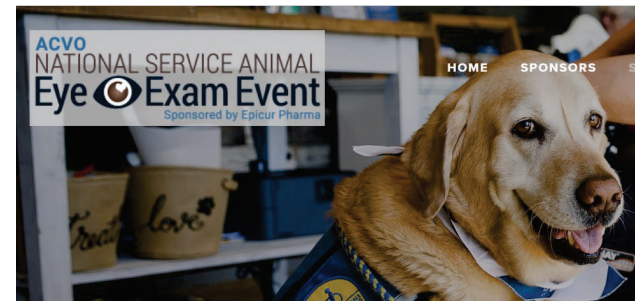
- **Preventive care:** core vaccines, annual HW/tick disease screening, fecal checks, heartworm and flea/tick preventatives. If the dog is trained by an organization, they may have guidelines to follow
- **Inquire about travel:** many dogs travel everywhere with owners, so non-core vaccines may be advisable
- **Dental evaluations/treatments:** focus on oral health and perform dental cleanings and assessments as needed
- **Annual laboratory screenings** (CBC, Chem, T4 UA)
- **ACVO** offers free ophthalmic exams for service dogs every May

## > Appointments

- Consider scheduling extra time for appointments
- Identify spaces that can accommodate the handler and dog
- Maintain a low-stress environment
- Minimize time in waiting room area to avoid interactions with dogs that are poorly behaved
- Avoid drop-off appointments if possible
- Allow the service dog team to stay together as much as possible

## > ACVO Free eye exams

Registration in April for exams in the month of May  
<https://www.acvoeyeexam.org/>





## > Exam, Diagnostics and Treatments

- Implement early intervention for health problems
  - e.g. Dental problems can impair the ability of a dog to use their mouth to retrieve items, pull over doors, etc.
- Ask about/acquire previous health records to review
- Always explain diagnostics, procedures and treatments
  - If appropriate, contact service dog organization – client may need authorization for financial consideration
  - Share records with the organization; many maintain ownership of dogs until retirement
  - For life-threatening conditions, please do not delay treatment waiting to get in contact with an organization

## > Nutrition/Weight Management

- It's imperative for dogs to maintain a healthy weight so they can perform their duties and to support their longevity
- Canine Companions does not allow raw food diets
- Organizations may set an "ideal weight" for a dog. Please support the client in maintaining this weight
- Previous studies on a population of Labradors at a guide dog school showed a higher prevalence of POMC mutation

Raffan et. al., *Cell Metab*, 2016 May10; 23(5): 893-900

## > Medications

- Be open with the handler about any potential side effects of medication, duration, etc.
- Avoid medication that will impact the dog's ability to work, if possible
- Sedatives, pain relievers, muscle relaxants, etc. can prevent a dog from working
- Corticosteroids: side effects
- Metronidazole has been shown to diminish olfaction in explosive detection dogs. **?Diabetic alert dogs?**  
Jenkins et. al., *Am J Vet Res* 2016 Aug;77(8):906-12

## > Communication

- When considering treatments or giving medications, ask the handler if they will have difficulty completing them. See if they have someone who can help them.
- Clearly communicate any potential side effects of medications that may impact the ability of the dog to work.
- Consider providing a written summary at the end of the visit that the handler can refer to.
- MS Word has an accessibility checker that helps identify possible issues for people with disabilities

## FUTURE SERVICE DOGS

Future service dogs are learning to assist a person with a disability.

> Don't have public access but rely on the goodwill of businesses to help prepare the puppies for their jobs



## > Reference materials

AMERICAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION  
Working, Assistance, &  
Therapy Dog Guidelines

AAHA Guidelines TOOLKIT

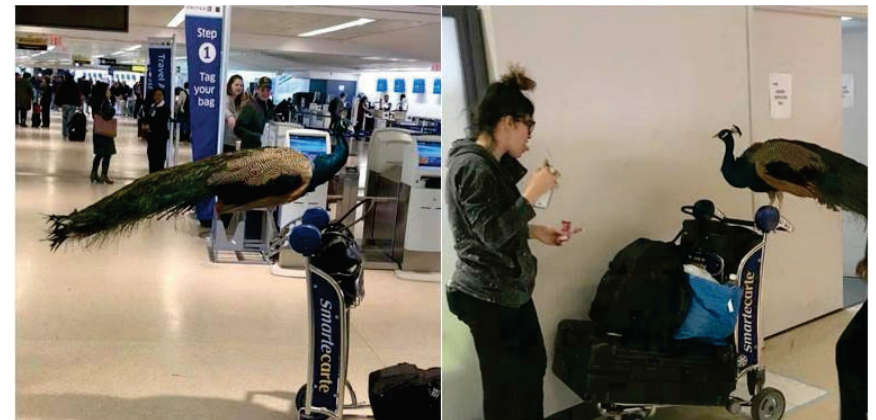
<https://www.aaha.org/aaha-guidelines/2021-aaha-working-assistance-and-therapy-dog-guidelines/toolkit/>

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/service-animals>

## Airline Travel with Service Dogs



## > Emotional support animals



## > Airline travel with a service dog

In 2021, the U.S. Dept. of Transportation updated the Air Carrier Access Act:

- Only task-trained service dogs fly free in the cabin.
- No more emotional support animals.
- Narrows the definition of a service animal to only include dogs.
- Requires airlines to treat psychiatric service animals the same as other service animals without additional documentation.
- Allows airlines to require passengers to submit paperwork before boarding with their service dog.

## > Air travel with a service dog

- Handler may need to fill out Dept of Transportation form
- Includes information about:
  - **Animal health**
  - **Training and behavior**
  - **Other assurances**
- To be submitted at least 48 hours before travel (except in emergency)
- Airlines that require this form must make it available on their website
- Veterinarian signature not required

According to the Department of Transportation Act of 1986, an agency may not require an applicant to complete a questionnaire to collect information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The current listing is 1545-0047. The current listing is 1545-0047. The current listing is 1545-0047. The current listing is 1545-0047.

**Warning:** It is a Federal crime to make materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements, entries, or representations knowingly and willfully on this form to secure disability accommodations provided under regulations of the United States Department of Transportation (49 U.S.C. § 10601).

**U.S. Department of Transportation Service Animal Air Transportation Form**

Service Animal Handler's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Service Animal User's Name (if different from Handler): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Service Animal Handler's Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Animal's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Description of the Animal (including weight): \_\_\_\_\_

**Animal Health**

[Insert Animal's Name] is vaccinated for rabies. Date of last vaccination: \_\_\_\_\_ Date vaccination expires in the dog: \_\_\_\_\_  
 To my knowledge, [Insert Animal's Name] does not have fleas or ticks or a disease that would endanger people or other animals.  
 Veterinarian's Name (signature not required): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Animal Training and Behavior**

[Insert Animal's Name] has been trained to do work or perform tasks to assist me with my disability.  
 Name of Animal Trainer or Training Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 [Insert Animal's Name] has been trained to behave in a public setting.  
 I understand that a properly trained dog remains under the control of its handler. I understand that a properly trained dog does not act aggressively by biting, barking, jumping, lunging, or injuring people or other animals. It also does not urinate or defecate on the aircraft or in the gate area.  
 I understand that [Insert Animal's Name] shows that it has not been properly trained to behave in public, then the airline may treat [Insert Animal's Name] as a pet by charging a pet fee and requiring [Insert Animal's Name] to be transported in a pet carrier.  
 To the best of my knowledge, [Insert Animal's Name] has not behaved aggressively or caused serious injury to another person/dog.  
 If you cannot check the box above, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Assurances**

I understand that [Insert Animal's Name] must be licensed, bonded, or insured at all times in the airport and on the aircraft.  
 I understand that if [Insert Animal's Name] causes damage, then the carrier may charge me for the cost to repair it, as long as the carrier would also charge passengers without disabilities to repair the similar kind of damage.  
 I am signing an official document of the U.S. Department of Transportation. My answers are true to the best of my knowledge. I understand that if I knowingly make false statements on this document, I can be subject to fines and other penalties.  
 Signature of the Service Animal Handler: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## > US DOT Service Animal Air Transportation Form

(49 U.S.C. § 10601)



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## > US DOT Service Animal Air Transportation Form

### Other Assurance

- I understand that \_\_\_\_\_ must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered at all times in the airport and on the aircraft.  
[Insert Animal's Name]
- I understand that if \_\_\_\_\_ causes damage, then the airline may charge me for the cost to repair it, as long as the airline  
[Insert Animal's Name] would also charge passengers without disabilities to repair the similar kinds of damage.
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- Signature of the Service Animal Handler: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## > The new DOT form is not without controversy...

**Airlines tried to stop fake service animals.  
It kept blind people off flights.**

New Department of Transportation rules have made flying more difficult, and at times, inaccessible to blind passengers

## > Travel Tips for Service Dog Handlers: Day of Travel

Skip or reduce the dog's meal before the flight.

Limit water leading up to the flight.

Exercise them prior to the flight if time allows.

Toileting break before going through security.

## > TSA



TSA needs to screen both the handler and the dog.



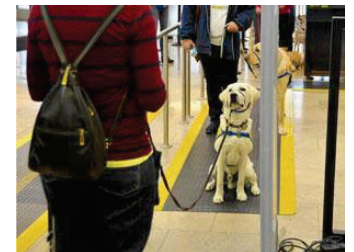
Go through the metal detector with the dog or have them sit while the person goes through. Call the dog.



TSA will pat the dog down and check their equipment.



TSA cannot require you to take off the dog's equipment, drop your leash, or take the dog from you.





## Loss of a Service Dog




The relationship between a service dog and partner is unique; significantly different than that between a companion pet and guardian. Notably, unlike the loss of a companion dog, the loss of a service animal places the partner in a physically, vocationally, and socially vulnerable position

Kogan et. al. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 31(2), 244–270

### Questions for handlers with dogs nearing retirement



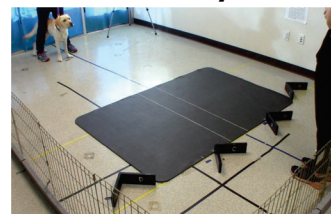
- 
- Is your dog starting to have a hard time getting up? How is your dog's energy level?
  - Is your dog restless at night?
  - Any problems with vision?
  - Is your dog having "selective" or diminished hearing?
  - Does it appear that your dog is needing a little longer to think about how to respond to commands?

## > Cognitive Changes with Aging



Detecting early signs of cognitive decline and understanding how activity patterns might affect cognition

### Memory



### Cognitive flexibility



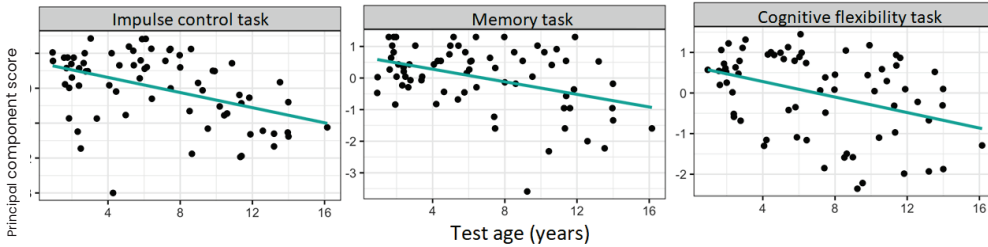
### Impulse



NIH Grant 3U19AG057377-03S1:

Development of Cognitive and Physical Activity Biomarkers for a Companion Dog Model of Alzheimer's Disease

## > Dog Aging Battery



n = 73 dogs

### Grant 3U19AG057377-03SI:

Development of Cognitive and Physical Activity Biomarkers for a Companion Dog Model of Alzheimer's Disease

## > End of life decisions - how can you help?



The client may wish to have the dog euthanized at home, if possible. If this is not a service you perform, please offer a referral.



If they desire, assist the client with preserving the memory of their service dog -such as private cremation or a pawprint memorial.



If the client received their dog from an organization, offer to send records and notify the school of the dog's passing. Encourage the client to reach out to them for support.



Provide the client with bereavement resources - online support groups, grief counseling, books about pet loss, etc.

# Thank You!



## Questions?

Remember to **download the CE certificate** in the handouts panel of the webinar control panel.  
NOTE: CE certificate not available for watching the recording.

Questions about CE?  
[events@heska.com](mailto:events@heska.com)

Questions about topic?  
[bkennedy@canine.org](mailto:bkennedy@canine.org)

Thank you for joining us!



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