

What is a veteran assistance dog?

Assistance dogs falls within the definition of 'assistance animal' in section 9 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. Assistance Animals are legally defined as a dog or other animal that is:

- Accredited under State or Territory law to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of disability;
- Is accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed in the regulations; or
- Is trained to assist a person with disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

DVA funds four types of assistance dogs for eligible veterans; guide dogs, hearing dogs, mobility dogs and psychiatric assistance dogs. These dogs:

- Meet the standard set out by Assistance Dogs International (ADI)
- Are individually trained in obedience
- Can perform at least 3 defined tasks that ease their handlers impairment; and
- Can pass a Public Access Test (PAT). PAT is the minimum standard an assistance dog must meet to be considered safe and effective in accessing public places and public passenger vehicles.

The majority of assistance dogs funded under DVA arrangements are psychiatric assistance dogs.

For more information on
DVA funded assistance dogs visit:
www.dva.gov.au/dogs

Psychiatric Assistance Dogs

Psychiatric assistance dogs are trained to perform specific tasks which contribute to a veteran's clinical recovery goals and could include:

- Detecting signs of distress; and
- Performing specific tasks to help alleviate those symptoms, such as waking a veteran if they are experiencing a night terror or nuzzling the veteran to distract them from emotionally disabling symptoms.

Psychiatric assistance dogs are trained to meet each veteran's individual clinical needs and the veteran is trained as an assistance dog handler. This training usually takes around 18 – 24 months before the psychiatric assistance dog commences living with the veteran.

To be eligible for a psychiatric assistance dog, the veteran must have:

- A Veteran Gold or White Card
- A diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a psychiatrist
- Be undergoing treatment with a psychiatrist or psychologist for PTSD for at least 3 months
- Be assessed as having the emotional resilience required to be involved in the training and care of a psychiatric assistance dog

Community Housing Organisations might:

- Consider the needs of assistance dogs in housing design to include an enclosed outdoor space in new builds
- Ask veterans as part of the assessment process if they are in the process of securing an assistance dog to help inform allocation decisions; and/or
- Consider the property allocation they make should a veteran already have an assistance dog.