

VETERAN AND VISITOR GUIDE

ANIMALS IN THE MEDICAL CENTER AND CLINICS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Q. What animals are allowed inside James A. Haley Veterans Hospital (JAHVH) and Clinics?**
 - A. We welcome guide and service dogs as long as facility rules are followed and they do not disturb the health care environment.
- **Q. What is a guide or service dog?**
 - A. A guide or service dog is one that has been trained to perform specific tasks or provide benefit for an individual with a disability. They include Seeing Eye dogs, hearing dogs, mobility dogs, and seizure response dogs.
- **Q. Are comfort animals and emotional support animals allowed?**
 - A. No. For the health, safety and comfort of all, only guide and service dogs are allowed.
- **Q. Where is a guide or service dog allowed?**
 - A. Guide and service dogs are allowed in public places. For safety and infection control purposes, guide and service dogs are not allowed in protected environments (e.g., operating or procedure rooms, isolation rooms, dialysis unit, intensive care areas, food preparation areas, and sterile processing areas.) They are also not allowed in areas that would be dangerous to the dog and handler (e.g. construction areas and areas operating machinery).
- **Q. What are the expectations of a guide or service dog and its handler?**
 - A. Guide and service dogs should be leashed or harnessed and under the control of their handler at all times. They should be well groomed with immunizations up to date. They should behave in a way that reflects their training. Their handler should not allow or encourage any of the following inappropriate behaviors:
 - No barking, biting, growling, snapping, showing aggression
 - No urinating or bowel movements in unapproved areas
 - No sniffing or bothering others or interacting with others
 - No damaging goods, taking food, begging, jumping, etc.
 - No behaviors that distract the dog from its work

The dog's handler is expected to provide all care and clean up for the dog. VA staff and volunteers are not allowed to care for a guide or service dog. The handler is responsible and liable for the dog's behavior and care.

- **Q. Does the VA provide a guide or service dog?**
 - A. No. Veterans approved for guide or service dogs are referred to accredited agencies.
- **Q. Does the VA provide benefits to a guide or service dog?**
 - A. Yes. The VA does provide some benefits of care for a guide or service dog. Please ask for a consult to Prosthetics Service for more information.

- **Q. What will happen if an animal other than a guide or service dog is in the facility or if a guide or service dog is not behaving properly?**
 - A. If you bring an animal that is not a guide or service dog into our facility or if your guide or service dog is acting inappropriately, you will be asked to remove the animal from our facility. If there is no one with you to remove the animal while you receive services, you may have to reschedule your appointments. Repeated violations could result in fines issued by the VA Police.

- **Q. What will happen if I become unable to care for my guide or service dog or require admission to the hospital?**
 - A. The dog handler is responsible for the animal at all times. If the handler cannot care for the dog, the handler should contact someone to take and care for the dog. VA Police will hold the dog for a short amount of time until it can be picked up. If you cannot locate someone to care for the dog within a reasonable amount of time, VA Police will contact the following places:
 - 1. local shelters to retrieve the dog at the owners expense
 - 2. the agency that provided the dog (if known) to retrieve it
 - 3. the county Animal Control Service to pick-up the dog

- **Q. Are any other animals allowed?**
 - A. The only other animals allowed are those with approved Recreation Therapy Service programs such as pet visitation, resident pets, and other animal-assisted activities. These animals and their handlers are coordinated by the Recreation Therapy Section of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service. If you have questions about these programs, please contact Chief, Recreation Therapy Section at 813-972-2000, extension 6583.

- **Q. What do I do if an unapproved animal is present, or a service dog or their handler is not acting properly?**
 - A. Please report the situation to a staff member who can contact VA Police.

- **Q. What if I am in a setting with a guide or service dog and I am uncomfortable?**
 - A. If you are in a waiting room or a group therapy setting where a guide or service dog is present and causing you concern, please report the situation to a staff member. If the guide or service dog and handler are behaving properly, we can offer you an alternative place to sit. If the animal is not a guide or service dog or acting properly, staff may assist.

This information is based on:

- Hospital Policy 00-04: Guide and Service Dogs on VA Property
- VHA Directive 2011-013: Guide Dogs and Service Dogs on VHA Property
- http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/psas/Guide_And_Service_Dogs_Frequently_Asked_Questions_FAQ3

For further information, please contact the VA Police at (813) 972-7554, or the Patient Advocates Office at (813) 972-5256.

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