



WOUNDED WARRIOR SERVICE DOG PROGRAM

WHAT IS THE WOUNDED WARRIOR SERVICE DOG PROGRAM?

The Wounded Warrior Service Dog Program (WWSDP) was established as a competitive grant program for nonprofit organizations to increase their capacity to raise, train, and place service dogs with eligible veterans and Service Members (SMs). The success of the pilot program, which was started in 2015, led to the House of Representatives passing legislation as part of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act to permanently authorize the WWSDP within the United States Department of Defense Health Programs. Since its inception, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) has helped to execute and further develop the program to meet the Congressional intent.

So many of our service members and veterans return home from the battlefield suffering from post-traumatic stress (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other mental and physical disabilities.

—Rep. James McGovern – MA

WHAT IS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

A service animal is defined in Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. Unlike other animals, service dogs have public access, which means they may accompany their handler into areas where the public is permitted, with some exceptions. Although the presence of any dog can provide comfort, dogs that exclusively provide emotional support or companionship are not defined as service dogs by law.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MILITARY WORKING DOG AND A SERVICE DOG?

Both Military Working Dogs (MWD) and Service Dogs (SD) are highly skilled professionals with extensive training, grooming, health, and medical requirements. Unlike SDs, which are trained to serve the needs of an individual with a disability, MWDs are trained warriors that serve alongside U.S. service members in austere conditions. While the training of MWDs, including explosive and drug sniffers, costs up to \$150,000,¹ a typical SD costs between \$25,000 and \$60,000.²

WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS?

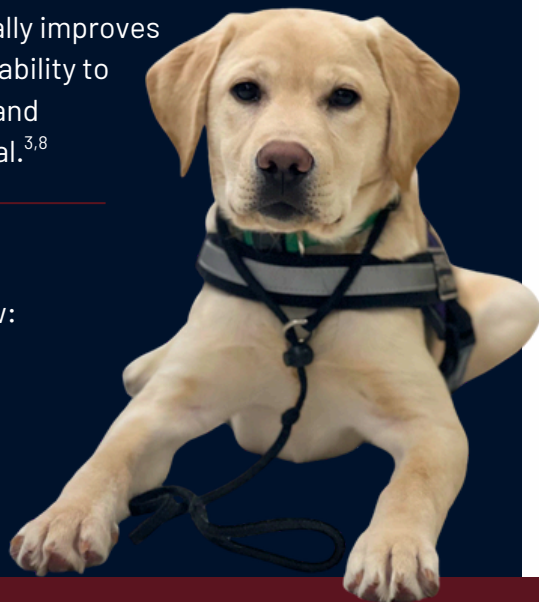
Military SM have increased exposure to natural disasters, dangerous training environments, and combat. These exposures are not only intense but also carry a heightened risk of physical, psychological, and emotional trauma. It is estimated that one in four U.S. veterans sustains a traumatic brain injury (TBI),³ and as many as 30% of those exposed to combat suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁴ Moreover, in 2021, Congress reported that a growing number of veterans suffer from complex mental health disorders, which increases the risk for suicide.⁵ The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reported that, when adjusted for the proportion of veterans in the population, the rate of suicide among U.S. veterans in 2022 was twice the rate of nonveterans.⁶

WHY RAISE, TRAIN, AND FURNISH SERVICE DOGS TO SMS AND VETERANS?

The addition of a service dog can significantly enhance the recovery, rehabilitation, and community reintegration of an SM or veteran suffering from a disability.² This is especially true for SM or veterans who are not responding to traditional treatments, suffer from side effects associated with medical treatments, or lack access to specialty care. The addition of a service dog represents a minimal-risk intervention with potential significant benefits. In a landmark study, the VA reported that service dogs significantly reduced suicide ideation at 18 months post-pairing.⁷ The U.S. Congress echoed this finding and concluded that pairing a service dog with a veteran dramatically improves the quality of life, ability to re-enter society, and chances of survival.^{3,8}

REFERENCES

Scan the QR below:



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

2,900+

SERVICE DOGS FURNISHED
TO SMS AND VETERANS

240+

GRANTS AWARDED TO
ELIGIBLE NONPROFITS

50+

ORGANIZATIONS
SUPPORTED

28

STATES AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FUNDED

WHAT MAKES THE WWSDP DIFFERENT THAN ANY OTHER FEDERAL FUNDING PROGRAM?

Since 2015, the WWSDP has been providing annual funding to non-profit organizations that specialize in the raising, training, and furnishing of service dogs to eligible SMs and veterans.

Unlike other programs that may limit funding to guide, hearing, and mobility dogs, the WWSDP supports all SMs and veterans, regardless of disability, including mental health conditions such as PTSD. Without this program, many SMs and veterans with psychiatric disabilities would not have access to the potential life-saving support they receive from a well-trained service dog.

Leveraging the unique expertise and resources at USU, the WWSDP incorporates a multidisciplinary team of administrative, budgetary, rehabilitation, medical, mental health, and veterinary specialists to ensure its success. In this process, this team ensures the awarding of competitive grants, and fosters collaboration among industry experts to advance service dog programs and the rehabilitation of SMs and veterans across the U.S.

The Wounded Warrior Service Dog Program has been a proven success – providing aid to organizations which train thousands of dogs that care for and treat veterans with physical disabilities and post-traumatic stress.

–Rep. James McGovern – MA