

Financial Help Is Available

The International Association of Assistance Dog Partners (iaadp.org) offers an emergency fund to US IAADP Partner Members whose assistance dogs require high-cost veterinary intervention beyond their ability to pay. *Only veterinarians can initiate the request.* (The human partner must be a member. Cost is \$30 annually.)

United Animal Nations Lifeline Grants (uan.org) provides funding to Good Samaritans, animal rescuers, and pet owners to help care for animals in life-threatening situations.

AAHA Helping Pets Fund (www.aahahelpingpets.org) is for those who need to access quality veterinary care for sick or injured pets.



To help you meet the special needs of dogs that provide independence to disabled people, Merck Animal Health and NEADS/Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans have prepared this informative overview of best practices for the medical treatment and well-being of these highly valued animals.



Merck Animal Health and NEADS have partnered to provide expanded capacity through financial contributions, healthcare product donations, and awareness about the ways service dogs improve the quality of people's lives.

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www.neads.org
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Dogs At Work Ensuring Optimum Care for Canine Assistants



The Power of Assistance Dogs

Assistance dogs empower people with disabilities by giving them greater independence. Today, they're helping children with autism, adults with post-traumatic stress disorder, the wheelchair-bound, and those who need alerts for seizures or other medical conditions. Their numbers are growing and you can expect to see many more in your practice. To best accommodate clients with assistance dogs, veterinary experts recommend the following protocols:



Take the Special Needs of Owners Into Consideration

Because disabled owners depend on their pets to overcome challenges, even a few hours without their help can cause hardship.

Try to choose quick treatment options that resolve the situation fast, minimizing the time to resume functioning at optimum health.

Take care of as many issues as possible during a single visit. It is often a struggle for owners to return for multiple appointments.

Use faster courses of action. For example, instead of treating an ear infection with an ear cleanser, cure it quickly with a once-a-day, broad-spectrum, antibacterial, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory product.

Veterinary Care Checklist for Assistance Dogs

- ✓ **Mouth, Eyes & Ears:** Broken teeth and eye and ear infections can interfere with the dog's ability to retrieve objects and hear or see potential dangers to the human partner.
- ✓ **Skin, Coat, Skeleton:** Assess body condition for performance, including the ability to carry weight of backpacks. Check for pressure sores/abrasions from harnesses.
- ✓ **Preventive Medicine:** A sick dog may pose difficulties for owners, so prevention should be emphasized.
 - Consider non-core vaccines in addition to core vaccines, such as Nobivac® Canine Flu H3N8, because most dogs are naive to this emerging, highly contagious virus.
 - For flea and tick protection, the Scalibor® 6-month tick and flea collar may be easier for a disabled person to manage.
- ✓ **Aging:** Be alert to signs of aging that may interfere with effectiveness, such as gait, balance, weight changes, heart and lungs, urinary and bowel habits, exercise tolerance, and behavioral changes.
- ✓ **Diet & Exercise:** Highly trained dogs are "on the job" at all times and must remain fit. Work with human partners to identify the most appropriate diets and an exercise program that respects the owner's disability.
- ✓ **Grooming:** Trim nails short and finish with a grinder—especially important when the human partner has fragile skin. Trim hair around footpads for traction.

Make Your Practice Assistance Dog Friendly

Observe the basics of good veterinary-client relations. Open communication and a relationship of mutual trust are especially critical. Make decisions together.

Use the presence of an assistance dog in the waiting room as a "teachable moment" for both children and adults, demonstrating basic service dog etiquette.

Make sure your office is ADA-accessible. People in wheelchairs need large examination rooms, and it is also helpful to have tables that can be lowered so they can see what's going on. When the person with disabilities has a van, veterinarians can do the exam in the van. Some even make house calls.

Be flexible on how procedures are scheduled. Can procedures be scheduled concurrently to cut down on visits? Can post-op be managed at home without an overnight hospital stay?



You can't always tell an assistance dog by the breed. Labradors and Golden Retrievers, Poodles, Collies, Terriers, even Chihuahuas and Pomeranians may be used today.

Follow Simple Rules for Assistance Dog Etiquette

Respect boundaries. Dogs don't want their space invaded any more than people do. This is particularly important for children whose natural curiosity may lead to distracting the dog and causing harm to the human partner.

Never touch, feed, or talk to an assistance dog without permission. Distractions prevent the animal from doing its job, creating a stressful situation for the dog and owner.

Talk to the person, not the dog. Many people feel uncomfortable around the disabled so they talk to the dog instead. While dogs can make disabilities less frightening, speak directly to owners and welcome questions with respect and courtesy.

Respect the dog-human partnership. Assistance dogs look to their owners for direction and are trained to observe human facial expressions that can be critical when the human partner needs to give nonverbal signals.

Follow the rules set out by the Americans with Disabilities Act guaranteeing all disabled people the right to use their assistance animals in all areas open to the general public.

