



FACT SHEET



**DEFENCE
COMMUNITY
DOGS**

APPLYING FOR A DCD ASSISTANCE DOG

Defence Community Dogs (DCD) provides highly trained Assistance Dogs to serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members, who need physical and emotional support for mood, depressive and anxiety disorders including Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Assistance Dogs can increase independence and self-esteem and are trained to provide home support and community access support. Veterans who have received Assistance Dogs through our program have described their dogs to be a truly invaluable part of their rehabilitation.

Read on to see the answers to the most frequently asked questions about our program.

Who is eligible to apply for a DCD Assistance Dog?

Serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members can apply for the Defence Community Dogs program. Veterans will also need to meet the following key criteria:

- A primary diagnosis of a mood, depressive or anxiety disorder from a Psychiatrist or Psychologist
- Must be able to handle and adequately exercise a 30-40kg dog on a daily basis
- Be willing to allow the dog inside the house the majority of the time
- Cannot have any pending criminal convictions or court appearances which have not yet been finalised
- Must be currently under the care of an appropriate medical professional to manage their medical and mental health conditions
- Cannot be currently undergoing treatment for substance abuse.

For a full list of eligibility criteria, please visit: dcdogs.com.au/apply-for-a-dog

Will my dog be an Accredited Assistance Dog?

Your dog will be trained to the level of an Accredited Assistance Dog. It is a requirement of the program that Veterans continue the required training (which is taught at the handover workshop and during follow-up training sessions) and then undertake regular Public Access Tests (PAT) in order for the dog to be legally accredited and recognised as an Assistance Dog in their state of residence. PAT testing is then required annually to maintain this accreditation.

How could an Assistance Dog help me?

Assistance Dogs can be a very valuable part of a rehabilitation program. Assistance Dogs can increase independence and self-esteem and are trained to provide home support, community support and community access support. Recipients of DCD Assistance Dogs have reported improved sleep patterns, reduced episodes of stress and anxiety, reduced reliance on medication, greater independence and a renewed ability to reconnect with family and friends. Partners and carers of recipients have also reported increased independence, and some have even been able to return to work.

Where do the dogs come from?

Every dog that enters the DCD program has been surrendered or rehomed, and must pass a strict health and temperament assessment before being accepted to undergo training.

What type of dog will I get?

DCD predominantly trains Labradors and Labrador-type dogs. These dogs tend to be medium to large in size and are generally active. All dogs in the program must have the right temperament to be an effective Assistance Dog.



Should I consider a DCD Assistance Dog?

Each Veteran will be asked to seriously consider whether an Assistance Dog is right for them and their circumstances.

Veterans will be asked to assess whether a dog will suit their lifestyle, their family situation and their budget. This is not designed to discourage applicants, but rather to ensure applicants are being realistic when considering how having an Assistance Dog will impact their life. For example, an Assistance Dog requires a daily commitment to care and exercise the dog.

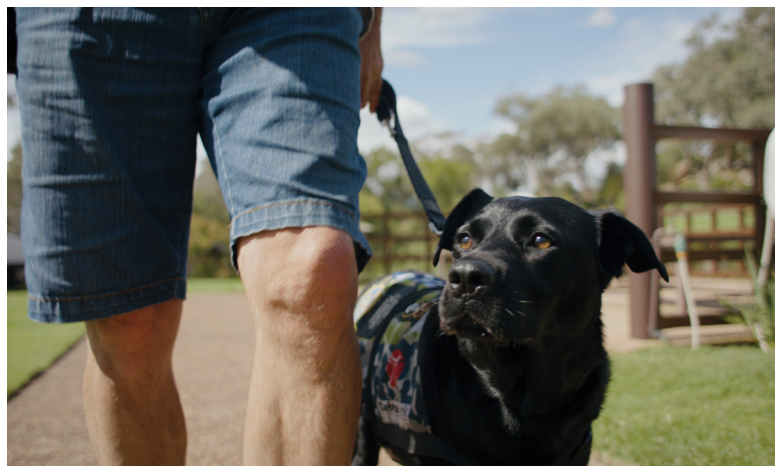
Veterans are also responsible for all costs associated with the ongoing training, feeding and care of the dog and Veterans need to ensure they maintain Public Access Testing (PAT) accreditation throughout the working life of the dog. It is also important that the whole family agrees and is fully aware of the implications of owning an Assistance Dog.

As with all dog training, it takes patience, persistence, dedication and consistency. An Assistance Dog is not the answer for every Veteran, it is not a magical cure, and your bond with your dog will not happen overnight. There will inevitably be some challenges and frustrations to overcome, and you will have to make some changes to your life to accommodate your dog.

So, before applying for a DCD Assistance Dog, please ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have the time?
- Am I dedicated enough to sit a Public Access Test (PAT) with my dog on an annual basis?
- Do I have the physical and mental energy required?
- Is this the right time for me?
- How will a dog affect my family and friends?
- Are my current living arrangements suitable to house a dog?
- How will I complete my everyday tasks with a dog?
- Can I live with a dog 24 hours a day, seven days a week?
- Can I afford a dog?
- Am I willing to clean up after the dog and regularly vacuum up the hair?
- Can I agree to the expectations of Defence Community Dogs?

Refer to the appendix for additional information to consider when answering these questions.



Can you provide any additional support for my condition?

Defence Community Dogs specialises in training dogs specifically to help Australian Defence Force Veterans with mood, depressive and anxiety disorders. We don't specialise in providing individuals with medical, psychological or PTSD support. We prefer to work with an individual's existing mental health expert who knows the veteran well. We also encourage veterans to maintain contact with their local veteran support groups to ensure ongoing support can be provided before and after taking ownership of a new dog.

What's involved in training a dog?

All dogs are trained to Assistance Dog level, with training specifically focused on supporting Veterans dealing with mood, depressive or anxiety disorders. Our dogs undertake at least 10 months – a minimum of 250 hours – of professional dog training and must pass numerous assessments in order to graduate. This level of training equips each dog with the competencies and skills required to complete a Public Access Test (PAT), through which they attain Assistance Dog accreditation.

Who trains the dogs?

All training takes place in Correctional Centres with the assistance of professional dog trainers and under the guidance of one of Australia's leading Dog Trainers, Steve Austin. Each dog is allocated to a handler for the duration of their training – a specially selected, minimum security inmate. Each dog spends 24 hours a day with their handler, who looks after all their needs – they even share a cell together.

How do I apply for a DCD Dog?

Each applicant will be required to provide:

- An Expression of Interest / initial application which can be found at dcdogs.com.au
- A fully completed Application Form (Stage 2)
- Evidence that you are (or were) a serving member of the Australian Defence Force
- A primary diagnosis of a mood, depressive or anxiety disorder from a Psychiatrist or Psychologist and a recommendation that an Assistance Dog would be of benefit
- Details about your medical and PTSD support network that will continue during and after the application process
- Where applicable, written permission from your landlord and/or employer to allow a dog on the premises
- Satisfactory completion of an Environmental and Suitability Assessment for the dog

Further requirements are outlined on our website. Applicants will be assessed and approved by the team at Defence Community Dogs based on the criteria above and all decisions are final.

When you're ready, visit dcdogs.com.au and click on 'Apply For a Dog'



What is the process once a Veteran is approved to receive an Assistance Dog?

After an application is approved, please remember that it may take some time to find a dog which is suitable and compatible to the needs of a Veteran, so patience will be essential. There are also a limited number of dogs available through this specialised program.

All dogs are specifically matched to their Veteran based on suitability, including environment, housing situation, family situation and exercise requirements. Initially, our Veteran Support Team will consult with the Veteran to determine the applicant's eligibility and suitability. This team will also determine what type of support is needed so the training of the dog can be customised if required. For example, if a Veteran has mobility issues then the dog they are matched with will be taught to pick up dropped items, take off jackets, or pick up walking sticks.

Once the dog has completed their training, the Veteran will be invited to attend a comprehensive handover workshop. The handover process will help recipients to bond with their dog and learn how to correctly handle, command and care for their new companion.

What's involved with the handover workshop?

The handover workshop is held over eight days at the Correctional Centre where the dog's training took place. Successful applicants will be required to make their own travel arrangements to attend their designated handover session, including covering travel costs. Subsidised accommodation is provided during handovers.

What are my obligations after receiving an Assistance Dog?

DCD Assistance Dogs are highly trained and well-socialised. However, you will need to practise skills and reinforce behaviours with your dog every day. It will be your responsibility to maintain the high standards of training and healthcare that will enable your dog to assist you and you will need to sit a Public Access Test before your dog is legally recognised as an Assistance Dog in your state. You will also be responsible for completing regular PAT requirements to maintain this accreditation.



What next?

We strongly suggest you consider all the points outlined in this fact sheet and appendix before deciding to proceed. This is not designed to discourage applicants, but rather to ensure you are being realistic when considering how having an Assistance Dog will impact your life. If, after honest self-examination, you decide that the benefits of having an Assistance Dog will outweigh the challenges, we welcome your application.

For more information about our award-nominated program, please visit dcdogs.com.au or email us at info@dcdogs.com.au




About us

The **Defence Community Dogs** program has been running since 2014, rehoming dogs, rehabilitating inmates and helping to repair the lives of Veterans. It is truly a unique Win-Win-Win program. We have successfully placed more than 55 Assistance Dogs with Veterans throughout Australia. Defence Community Dogs is the only independent program in Australia that trains dogs to Assistance Dog level and provides them free-of-charge to Australian Defence Force Veterans. It costs around \$30,000 over the life of the dog to train, place and support each Assistance Dog and Veteran in our program.

The **Defence Bank Foundation** is a registered independent charity with DGR status, established to support serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members. The Foundation raises funds to meet the costs of the Defence Community Dogs program. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.
ABN 19 814 426 820



 dcdogs.com.au

 info@dcdogs.com.au

 [/dcdprogram](https://www.facebook.com/dcdprogram)

 [/defence_community_dogs](https://www.instagram.com/defence_community_dogs)

Improving the lives of Veterans. One paw at a time.



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APPENDIX: OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE APPLYING FOR AN ASSISTANCE DOG

Do I have the time?

DCD Assistance Dogs are highly trained and well-socialised. However, you will need to practise skills and reinforce behaviours with your dog every day. It will be your responsibility to maintain the high standards that will enable your dog to assist you.

Am I dedicated enough to sit a Public Access Test (PAT) with my dog on an annual basis?

When your dog is first placed with you, you will need to attend regular weekly training sessions with a qualified dog trainer to prepare for the Public Access Test (PAT). This is a requirement for your dog to be accredited and legally recognised as an Assistance Dog in your state of residence. This can take six to twelve months after graduation, depending on your dedication and commitment. Ongoing PAT testing is required every one to two years, so Veterans are encouraged to attend regular dog training sessions throughout their dog's life.

Do I have the physical and mental energy required?

The first year will be challenging. Establishing good habits and routines is crucial to the future success of the partnership between you and your dog. In order to ensure it stays fit and healthy, you will need to walk your dog at least once daily, for a minimum of 30 minutes.

Is this the right time for me?

The first year requires a great deal of effort. You will need to dedicate a lot of time to developing your skills, the dog's skills and nurturing the bond and communication between you. Ask yourself if you are ready:

- Do I have stable housing arrangements?
- What other demands do I have on my time over the next 12-18 months?
- Do I have the time to commit to working with a dog?
- Do I have my medication stabilised?
- Have I resolved any drug or alcohol addictions?
- Have I had surgery recently or have surgery booked in the next six months?

How will a dog affect my family and friends?

Your dog will become part of your everyday life, so you need to consider how you will accommodate a dog in your life before applying. All members of your household should be in full support of you getting an Assistance Dog and allowing it to be with you in the house. You will also need to consider how an Assistance Dog will impact your social life and activities conducted outside your house.

Are my current living arrangements suitable?

All our dogs are medium to large size dogs. You will need to consider whether your home and yard are large enough to accommodate a dog. You will need enough space for the dog to exercise and play outside, secure fencing around your entire yard and suitable areas for toileting and feeding your dog. You will also need sufficient space inside for crates, dog beds, dog toys and grooming equipment. If you are living in apartment-style housing, you will need to take into consideration the size of your apartment, the dog's exercise needs and suitable outdoor places to allow your dog to toilet and have free time outside. Apartment-style housing will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

How will I complete my everyday tasks with a dog?

Owning an Assistance Dog means they go almost everywhere with you. You should consider your current lifestyle and how a dog will fit within it. Review your regular activities (for example: the gym, the shops, movies, participating in sporting activities, catching up with family and friends) and carefully consider whether an Assistance Dog will help you or hinder you in completing these activities.

Can I live with a dog 24 hours a day, seven days a week?

You will need to be prepared to exercise your dog daily and to regularly groom and wash your dog. Living with a dog also involves some not-so-pleasant tasks. If you are fanatical about cleanliness, please consider:

- You are going to have to pick up dog poo, both at home and out on walks
- How will you deal with wounds and accidents?
- Dogs shed hair so you'll need to frequently vacuum your house
- Dogs require regular grooming. Have you got time to do this?
- Dogs often leave slobber on clothes. Will you be able to deal with this?
- Dogs can be distracted by sights and smells, and potentially pull on their leash. Are you physically able to deal with this?

Can I afford a dog?

DCD Dogs are not currently covered by DVA. Owning a dog requires a significant financial commitment to ensure your dog stays healthy and able to support you. You will need to feed your dog well to maintain its good health and ensure it has regular vet checks. You will also need to financially commit to supporting your dog for at least the next 10 years. We have provided a guide to these costs in Appendix B. In addition, we strongly recommend you consider taking out pet insurance to cover any unexpected large vet expenses.

Am I willing to clean up after the dog and regularly vacuum up the hair?

Dogs toilet multiple times each day, can make a mess when eating and shed fur. For the health and safety of you and your family, you will need to be prepared and willing to clean up toileting waste and other messes regularly, including vacuuming up hair at least every couple of days.

Can I agree to the expectations of Defence Community Dogs?

We expect you to provide the dog with a secure, loving home, and to commit to maintaining a high standard of training throughout the dog's life. We require that you make the dog's health and wellbeing a priority and ensure that sufficient exercise and mental stimulation are an integral part of the dog's daily life. You will also need to commit to maintaining regular dog training and completing an Annual Public Access test with your dog.

THE AVERAGE COST OF KEEPING AN ASSISTANCE DOG

Please consider your ability to cover the costs below very seriously. It is important that your dog's training, health and wellbeing are maintained at a high standard throughout their entire lives. Please note, all costs below are estimates only. Your costs may vary from these.

A guide to start-up costs

ITEM	COST
Appropriate toys – such as chew toys and play toys	\$60
20kg bag of premium dry food	\$130
Crate	\$150
ID tag (engraved)	\$20
Water and food bowls	\$30
Treat pouch/container	\$30
Training collar and leads	\$150
Grooming equipment – such as a brush	\$50
Mat/futon – for travel and an additional area in the home	\$80
Initial dog training when you get home	\$300+
TOTAL	\$1,000

A guide to annual costs

(Note: DVA will not currently reimburse expenses associated with your DCD dog)

ITEM	COST
Feeding - premium quality dry food plus enrichments, including raw bones	\$1,500
Vet visits, including annual health check, C5 vaccination and heartwork injection (this is the absolute minimum number of veterinary visits in a year)	\$500
3-monthly intestinal worming	\$100
Tick and flea control	\$300
Grooming and care equipment – including wet wipes, brush, poo-bags, ear cleaner, bowls	\$100
Toys and treats	\$200
Pet insurance	\$400+
Ongoing maintenance training and annual PAT test	\$500+
TOTAL	\$3,600

