



FACT SHEET



APPLYING FOR A DCD ASSISTANCE DOG

An introduction to the program

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.

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.

All dogs are trained to Assistance Dog level, with training specifically focused on assisting Veterans to cope with their illnesses and injuries. 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. 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.

Once a dog has completed its extensive training program it can be matched with a suitable and eligible Veteran. All the dogs in our program are provided at no cost to the Veteran. However, Veterans are responsible for all ongoing costs for the upkeep of their new Assistance Dog, including food and veterinary care.

Who is eligible to apply for an 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

How do Veterans apply for an Assistance Dog?

Veterans can apply online by visiting dcdogs.com.au and clicking on 'Apply For a Dog'. Each applicant will be required to provide:

- An Expression of Interest / initial application
- A fully completed Application Form (Stage 2)
- Evidence that they 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 their medical and PTSD support network that will continue during and after the application process
- Where applicable, written permission from their landlord and/or employer to allow a dog on the premises
- Satisfactory completion of an Environmental and Suitability Assessment for the dog

What needs to be considered?

Each Veteran will be asked to seriously consider whether a dog is the right solution for them. Veterans are guided through the key considerations before they apply, to help 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 they are being realistic when considering how an Assistance Dog will impact their life. An Assistance Dog is a big commitment, and requires ongoing training, daily care and exercise.

What happens once a Veteran is selected 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.

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



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 happens after receiving an 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.

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.



Proudly supported by

Defence Bank
FOUNDATION

C081 11/2021A General info