

# Mental Health Assistance Dogs

## A.W.A.R.E. DOGS AUSTRALIA INC FOR PROVIDERS



*Dedicated to Responsible  
Mental Health Assistance Dog  
Advocacy, Education,  
Training, and Placement*

# A.W.A.R.E. Dogs



[www.awaredogs.org.au](http://www.awaredogs.org.au)

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<http://www.PSYCHDOG.org>

### Is there research on MHADs?

There is peer-reviewed research available that supports the use of dogs for therapeutic outcomes. The following articles may aid your understanding of the value of these dogs. There are a minimum of 75 peer-reviewed published studies (with control groups) on human-animal interactions.

Beetz et al (2012), in their review of the literature, write of "well-documented positive effects" for people in the areas of mood, stress, self-reported fear and anxiety, etc, and demonstrated effects on cortisol, heart rate, blood pressure, and general physical/mental health. Beetz et al 2012 found limited but positive evidence for effects on epinephrine, norepinephrine, immune system functioning, pain management, etc.

[http://www.frontiersin.org/psychology\\_for\\_clinical\\_settings/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234/abstract](http://www.frontiersin.org/psychology_for_clinical_settings/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234/abstract)

Hooker et al (2002) did a historical review on the positive health effects of assistance animal activities.

[http://journals.lww.com/hnpjournal/Abstract/2002/10000/Pet\\_Therapy\\_Research\\_A\\_Historical\\_Review.6.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/hnpjournal/Abstract/2002/10000/Pet_Therapy_Research_A_Historical_Review.6.aspx)

Souter & Miller (2007) identified five randomised controlled studies of animal therapy to reduce depressive symptoms and found statistical significance with medium magnitude.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bloomsbury/azoos/2007/00000020/00000002/art00007>

A number of journals publish on animal-human relationships. Some are: Animal Studies Journal, Animals and Society Journal, Anthrozoos, Between the Species, Humanimalia, Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin, Journal for Critical Animal Studies, Journal of Human-Animal Interaction, Society & Animals Journal.

# Mental Health Assistance Dogs (MHADs)



## What is a Mental Health Assistance Dog (MHAD)?

A dog individually trained to work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual disabled by mental illness.

## What is a disability?

A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Having a psychiatric diagnosis does not necessarily mean that you are disabled under the law. What matters is that the degree of impairment is 'substantial'. Consequently, it is in your best interest to document your disability. Working with your doctor is a good first step. Ask your doctor to write a letter stating that you are disabled and that he/she supports your use of a MHAD. Keep such a letter on file.

## What types of mental health impairments can be assisted by a MHAD?

Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, Panic Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Agoraphobia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Personality Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and others.

## What tasks can MHADs be trained to do?

- ◆ Remind handler to take medication at a specified time
- ◆ Turn on lights and search a room for intruders
- ◆ Warm handler's body during a panic attack
- ◆ Interrupt checking and other repetitive behaviors
- ◆ Stay with handler during acute emotional stress
- ◆ Accompany handler outside the home
- ◆ Alert to mania, panic attacks or dissociative episodes
- ◆ Interrupt dissociative episodes or flashbacks
- ◆ Assist handler in discerning 'reality' from auditory or visual hallucinations
- ◆ Mediate hyper-vigilance, assist with threat assessment secondary to PTSD
- ◆ Provide a constant, safe grounding presence
- ◆ Be trustworthy companion when handler is negotiating paranoia
- ◆ Homeostasis stabilization

## Where are MHADs allowed to go?

Assistance Dogs, also known as Service Dogs are allowed access to spaces open to the public, including but not limited to: restaurants, hospitals, airplanes, doctor's offices, cabs, zoos, stores etc.

## Where may MHADs be lawfully excluded?

MHADs may be lawfully excluded from private homes. They may also be excluded from spaces where their presence constitutes a safety risk, (e.g., operating rooms, radioactive laboratories, heavy construction sites) or an imminent threat.

## What about my clients and staff, who allergic or fearful of dogs?

If the allergic or phobic condition in question, rises to the legal definition of a disability, the BOTH the allergic or phobic person AND the client with a MHAD must be accommodated at the location. Remember, very few allergic or phobic conditions are disabilities under the law. However, it is best to err on the side of safety. Welcome the MHAD team and ask the allergic or phobic person to sit away from the dog.

## How may I support my client's decision to use a MHAD?

Keep an open mind. Help your client build a support team (e.g., physician, therapist, trainer, peers). Use the internet to educate yourself about MHADs. Ask your client how the dog is being trained to assist. If your clinical judgment supports you to do so, provide the client with a letter of disability supporting his/her use of a MHAD.

